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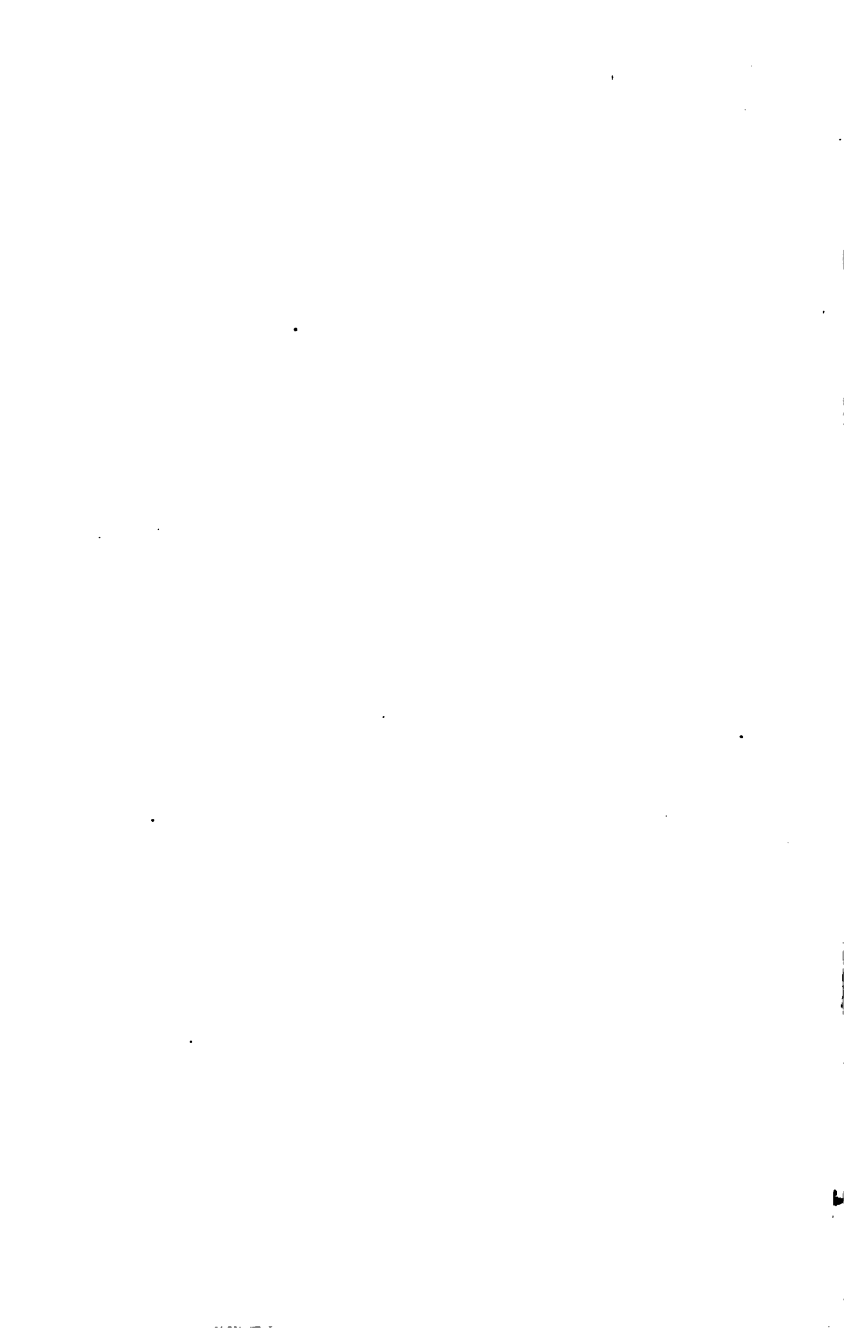
Montezuma's Gold Mines

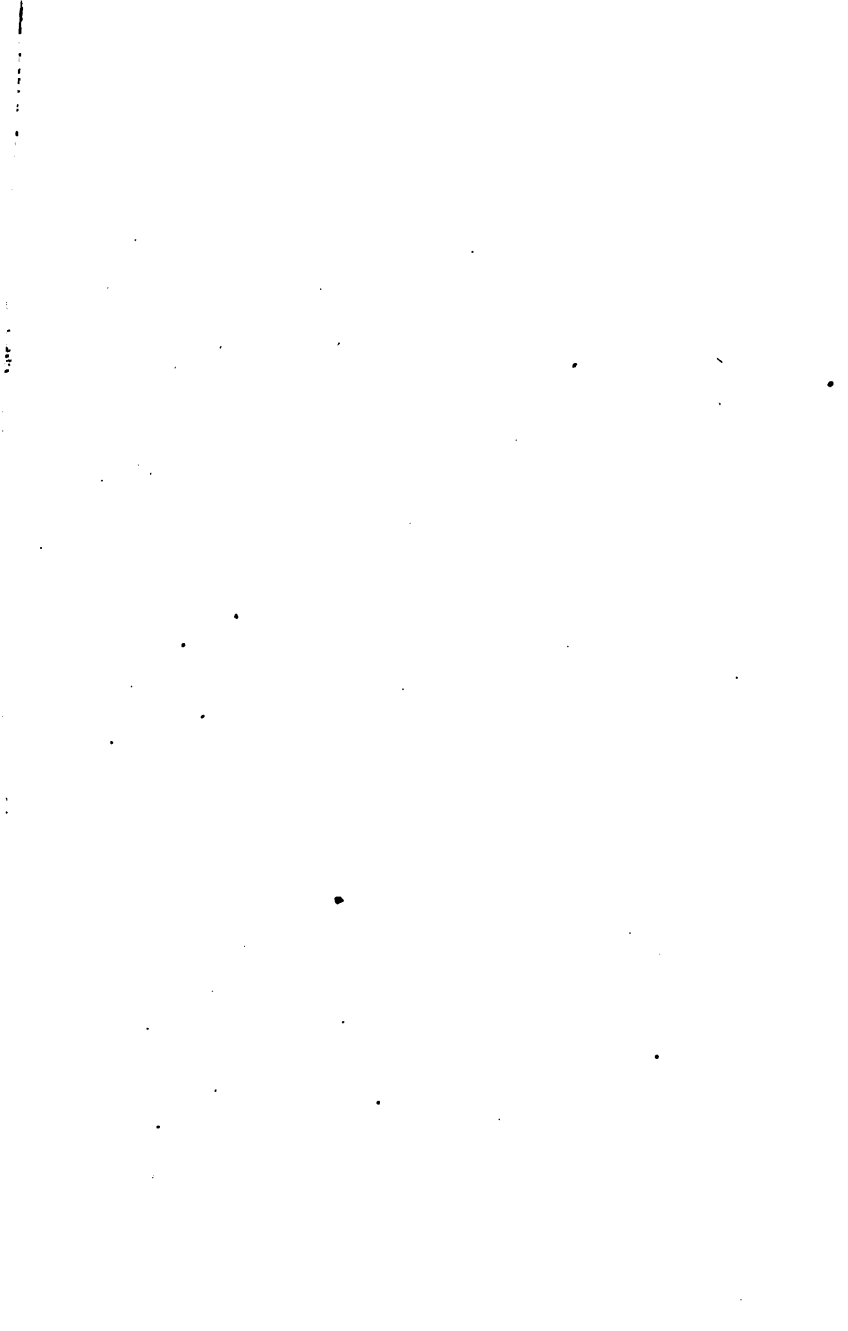


Fred. A. Ober.











THE SLEEP-SONG OF THE MAYAS.

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MONTEZUMA'S

GOLD MINES

BY

FRED A OBER

Author of
The Silver City
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and others

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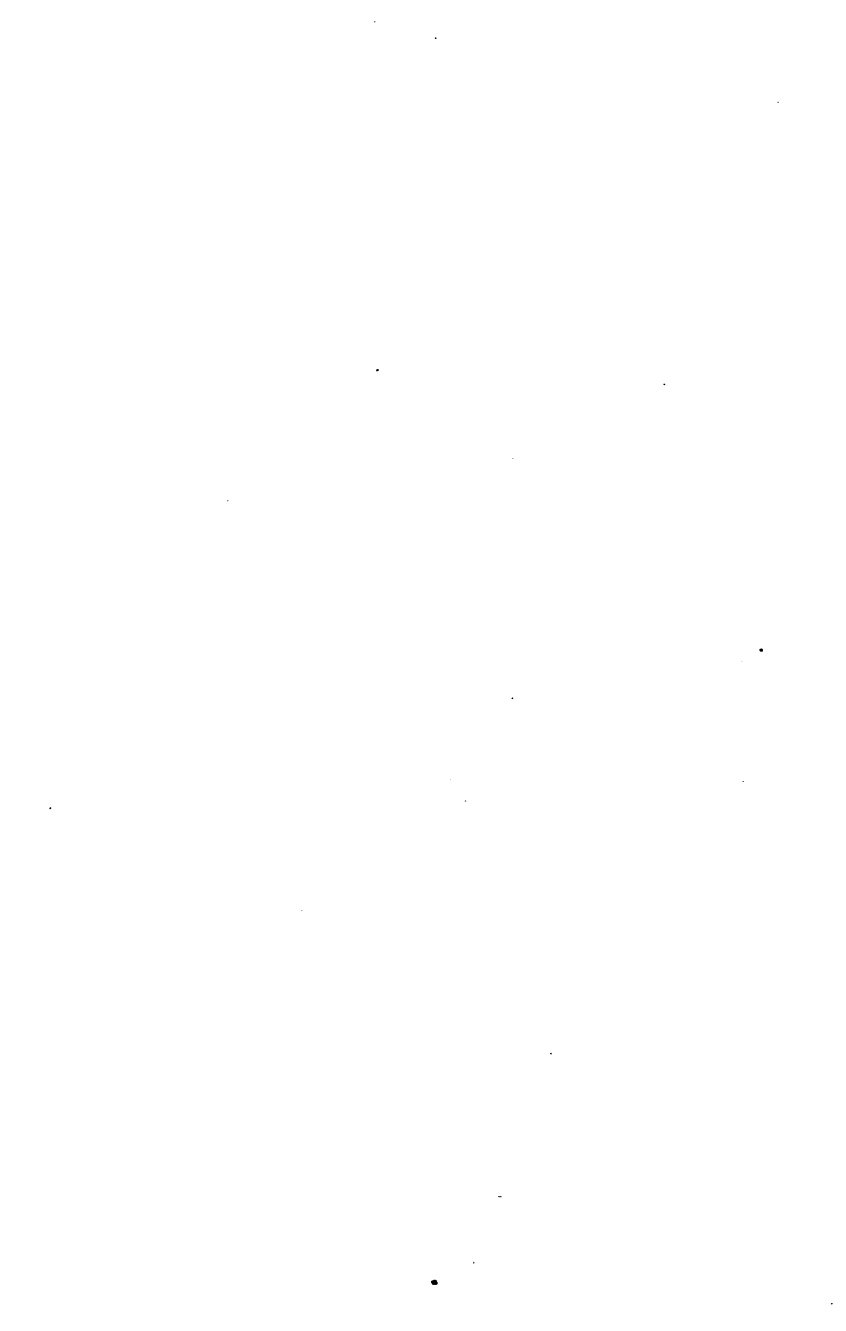
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MONTEZUMA'S GOLD MINES.

CHAPTER I.

FAREWELL, COZUMEL.

BENEATH the golden roof-tree of a palm, on the sandy shore of Laguna Santa Cruz, lay stretched the figure of a youth within sound of the surf-beat of the blue and sparkling waters of the Caribbean Sea.

It is a land-locked lakelet — Laguna Santa Cruz — on the coast of Cozumel, an island lying east of the mysterious peninsula of Yucatan. Deep and sombre are the woods of Cozumel, containing within their secret depths the ruins of most ancient buildings, pyramids, and perhaps palaces—sole mementos of a people passed away. Spicy and

fragrant are the gales that sweep over these forests and drift languidly across to the main land, laden with the sweets of a thousand blossoms, with the perfume of palms, and the honey-scent of frangipanni. For centuries have these honeyed breezes blown the odors of Cozumel over to the silent main, giving to this fair isle its name, "Cozumel, Island of Honey-bees."

The solitary palm that sheltered the motionless form from the sun waved its leaves in the afternoon breeze, sending a flickering play of shadow over the yellow sand beneath, and letting in, now and again, an ardent beam; but even the piercing shaft of Helios failed to move this sleeper on the shore. The cocoa-nuts above clashed noisily together, the dry flower-spathes rustled against the trunk, and the long branches of the palm swayed this way and that with the coming breath of evening; still no movement beneath. Even when a boat-keel grated upon the sand and there leaped out three half-naked men who advanced stealthily upon the slumberer, he stirred not. It seemed then that a quivering shock passed through trunk and

branches of the palm, and that she essayed to lift her leaves and beat her stem ; but the wind had wholly died away, and the sun was fast nearing the horizon ; a great red disk in the amber sky. Well might the pitiful palm have shuddered with apprehension, noting what proceeded at her very feet ; that the unresisting boy was bound with twisted cords of bark and borne to the boat ; that the hut in which he had dwelt — standing in sight at the edge of the forest — was swiftly searched, ransacked and then set on fire. As the flames crackled fiercely amongst the dry leaves that thatched the hut — plumes that had once greenly adorned her own coronet — Palma saw these wild-looking strangers load the boat with their plunder and push off into the lake.

The glowing disk in the West extinguished its fires in the Gulf of Mexico ; paler grew the sky, swiftly drawing over its face the curtain of night, spangled with stars ; and then the palm-tree was left alone, brooding above its silent lake, and watching the smoke of the burning hut as it rose upward and drifted over the forest.

Afloat on the heaving Caribbean Sea, the boat guided by a fierce-gesturing helmsman, took its course northwardly, after turning out of the inlet that connected with the lake, finally reaching a small vessel that lay in mid-channel. The sail was hoisted and the craft bore away to the north.

Not till then — not till their canoe had been fastened securely astern, and its contents distributed aboard the larger boat; the unresisting prisoner stretched out under the lee-rail, sheltered by a sail; and a steaming supper brought by the cook from the caboose — did the sailor speak.

“He sleeps well!” said the oldest of the trio, indicating by a nod the prisoner under the lee-rail. He was a sturdy weather-beaten sailor — the speaker — with coarse features, curling black hair, a grizzly beard, and eyes black as night, having in their keen twinkle a suggestion of evil deeds in their owner’s past.

“But well, then, Antonio,” spoke out the next younger, who much resembled the old man in garb and feature, “what less could he do than

sleep! did not Juanito whisper in his ear the sleep-song of the Mayas? Will he ever wake?"

Juanito was the youngest of the crew, a slender, graceful lad, clad in ragged shirt and trousers through various rents in which elbows and knees protruded. His skin was a beautiful golden-bronze in color, his cheeks flushed with the red of the mango; his eyes were of soft lustrous black. Grace of motion, fineness and nobility of feature distinguished him from his companions, as though he might have perhaps in him the spirit of the *conquistadores*—the conquerors—of his native Mexico.

"He will wake at dawn," the lad answered carelessly; "that is sure enough. But do not you dare loosen the cords till I have had a word with him, lest he do harm to some of us."

The conversation was in rough Spanish. The three fishermen were Mexicans. They had come up from the eastern coast of Yucatan, whither they had gone to fish for turtle, and were now on their way back to the Laguna de Terminos, many days' distant on the other shore of the peninsula.

"But how did you put *el señor extranjero* into

slumber so lasting?" asked Manuel, regarding the lad with admiration.

"*Como?* — How? Trust Juanito when there is work that needs wits. It was this morning, early; *el solitario* was astir with the dawn; I watched him from the forest; he came out from his *jacal* and built a fire in front of it, placing over it the kettle in which he makes his chocolate. Then he went down to the shore, to his *canoa*, and before he came back I had been at the fire; I had lifted the cover of the chocolate, I had dropped into it the sweet gum."

"Thou didst well," said the grim and grizzly Antonio. "Without thee and thy sleep-song *el estrangero* might have been even now, hunting the forest for the night-birds of Cozumel, and it would have fared hard with us had we attempted to capture him when his eyes were open! His enemies fear him and admire him — the young Gringo!"

"But why," asked Manuel, "have we taken him?"

"Are not five hundred *pesos de oro* a good reason?" laughed Antonio. "*Si, amigos*, five hundred dollars for Antonio as master of the vessel,

and one hundred for Juanito, and one hundred for Manuelito ! ”

“ Ah ! ” said Manuel thoughtfully. “ But yet, wherefore ? Why did we steal upon this stranger, abduct him from an island all uninhabited save by himself, destroy his property, and burn his dwelling down ? Who pays the *pesos de oro* ? ”

“ Softly, *amigo mio* ; the end is not yet. We do this youth no harm ; he will be set free again — perhaps. And now, who pays ? and why does he pay ? Didst ever hear of Christobal ? ”

“ Who has not heard of the dread chief of the Sublevados ! ” cried Manuel. “ Did he not descend upon my own fishing-camp, two seasons ago, despoil it, and murder two of my companions ? ”

“ Thou hast seen him then ? ”

“ No good Mexican ever saw Christobal and escaped to tell of it. ”

“ So ? Still thou hast seen him. Dost remember the night we were anchored in Espiritu Bay, under the lee of the mangrove islet ? ”

“ I remember, ” broke in Juanito ; “ I rowed you ashore, and you talked two hours with a tall and

stately Indian while Manuelito watched, rifle in hand, ready to fire at *el barbero*, should he attempt to harm us."

"True; and yet Manuelito has not seen Christobal!"

"Was *that* Christobal? *Dios mio!*"

"None other — most famous of the Sublevados, our most revengeful enemy. Now listen, and I will tell what he had to say to me — to me, Antonio Caravel, humble fisher of turtle on the shore of Yucatan."

Antonio paused, for he had been eating all this time; took a long draught from a water-gourd, and then began a singular narration:

"You must know that this young American came here to our country uninvited; that he and his companions roamed through the sacred forests for months, shooting the wild birds and beasts, peering into the ruined temples as if to pry out the secret of their origin, and even going down into the country of *los barbaros*, whence they returned uninjured — though *Dios* knows they may not have deserved at all a safe exit! But they returned to

Cozumel, and his *compañeros* sailed away North without him, leaving him there alone.

“Now, answer for yourselves like true Mexicans: Did those *compañeros* intend that *el solitario* should remain here alone forever? Did they not certainly intend, instead, to return leading armies prepared to invade the country, carry the Sublevados into slavery, and plunder the sacred cities beyond? Of this Christobal feels certain. Though he be a savage Christobal has the wisdom of chieftains. This was the subject of our converse on the Espiritu sands. Sure it is that Christobal feared an invasion of Americanos, and engaged me to remove the guide — this white bird-hunter — kill him he dare not, mind you all! No army without a guide and leader can penetrate the sacred interior. So would the invasion come to naught forever. So it was the great Sublevado chief gave to me the seven hundred *pesos de oro* to remove the dread *Gringo* from the island, to a place far and forever distant — and this we have done, and two hundred *pesos* are yours, my friends. Let us to the division.”

Manuel and Juanito eagerly assented, for their

fingers had been itching for a grasp on the leathern pouch which Antonio had brought aboard with him and carefully stowed away in his bunk.

He went below, now, and then came up, the bag in his hand, pouring its contents out upon the top of the "house." The sloop was sailing along on level keel and the glittering coins did not roll away. Beneath the dim light of an oil lantern suspended to the main-boom, they clustered around their treasure, with hands trembling for its division. The man at the wheel and the cook were the only other members of the crew; the latter was busy in the galley, but the former stood just behind the group, and saw the shining heap of silver and gold as it poured from the inverted bag. He could not restrain an exclamation of wonder, and craned his neck to look over Antonio's shoulder, letting slip his hold on the wheel for a moment, thereby causing the craft to lurch, setting some of the *pesos* rolling wildly about the deck.

Antonio jumped up with a cry, while the helmsman recovered himself, and the two companions scrambled after the fugitive coins. These were

soon all gathered again, apparently, and they proceeded to count them, dividing the gold from the silver. But the number of *pesos* did not tally with Antonio's expectations; there were two *onzas* of gold missing—two golden doubloons of sixteen dollars each.

"That rascally Pedro," muttered Antonio. "Why didn't he mind the sloop! *Hola!* Juanito, you're sitting on an *onza*; get up, sly thief, and render over the other!"

Saying which, Antonio excitedly reached out and snatched a gold piece from under the strippling's leg.

"Give me the other, *perillo*, dog of a boy, or I'll throw you into the sea!"

Juanito protested; he had not seen the other, and his sitting on the one was an accident. Antonio refused to believe him. Gathering the coins into the pouch, he hurriedly thrust it into a corner and advanced threateningly. But Juanito was a plucky youth who had always fought for a living, and had held his own. Seeing the old sailor's intention, he backed up against the rail and drew

his knife. Then Antonio smiled diabolically, made a feint at him with his left hand and, as the knife flashed out to meet it, stooped quickly, seized the boy by the leg, and whirled him over the rail into the sea.

CHAPTER II.

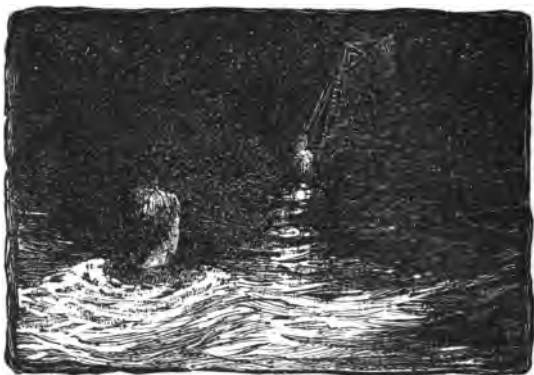
THE DESCENDANT OF MALINCHE.

THERE was less of confusion on board the sloop than one unused to Mexicans would have expected. At the time they were running very near an island with white ledges jutting out into the water, an islet densely covered with vegetation. The helms-man was for putting the vessel about and throwing a rope to the boy who was swimming lustily astern. But Antonio forbade :

“Let him alone ; the water will cool his blood. Run into yonder bay, where the rim of sand lies between the two cliffs. He will follow.”

Hurling a malediction at the swimmer, he turned on his heel. Soon the bay was reached — a little cove, rather — and the dying breeze, cut off by the cliffs, drove their bows gently upon the sand. Anchor was thrown out, master and mate leaped

ashore. Then Juanito, sullenly shaking the water from his face, reached up for the gunwale and climbed over in. He found the cook and helmsman laughing over the affair, and soon he saw that his master, having had the best of it, had con-



JUANITO'S COLD BATH.

cluded to forget the quarrel, especially as he had discovered the gold-piece, under a coil of rope. But Juanito had no intention of forgetting. That sudden plunge into the dark waters which were sometimes swarming with sharks was not an agreeable incident. He paid no attention to the overtures of Antonio. Refusing to go ashore and

join the others, he crawled off upon the deck, where he divested himself of his scanty garments and wrung the water from them. As he was reaching out for a blanket, in which to wrap himself, for the night was cool, his arm was arrested in mid-air by a slight movement of the hitherto silent prisoner who lay where they had stretched him out under the gunwale. The fingers of his left hand were working feebly, as if to untie the withes that bound the wrists.

Following up, with a glance, from the hand to the head, Juanito was met by a flash from a clear brown eye, which gazed into his unflinchingly, and yet inquiringly. The light from the lantern fell directly upon the prisoner's face, bringing it out clearly, as he lay on his back in the semi-darkness. It was a young, handsome, white "American" face. As the Mexican lad gazed at him a look of admiration sprang into his eyes. Then a sudden flash of resolve crossed his face like a brilliant smile. He gathered the blanket about him, advanced, sat down by the prostrate form, took the weak hands and began to unbind the

wrists. Suddenly he stopped short. Bending down to the prisoner's ear, he whispered: "*Habla usted Espanol?*—Do you speak Spanish?"

A movement of the head answered him. "So? Then you can understand. If I unbind you, you will not try to escape—not to-night? Nor will you harm me?"

"No." The answer came huskily, as though by great effort.

Then Juanito again attacked the withes, nor did he desist until the young man was free. After several efforts to regain his feet "*el Norte Americano*," as Juanito designated him in his mind, finally reached a sitting posture, aided by his liberator. He looked about him, in a dazed way, leaning against the rail, breathing heavily, and evidently with difficulty.

Juanito regarded him critically. "That will pass," he said half to himself, "that will pass very soon. Lie down again, I advise you," he whispered in Spanish. "You will breathe better. Then, too, Antonio is there on the beach; he should not see you. You of course do not know

Antonio. But so do I. Therefore I hate him ! Also you should hate him. You and I shall have a revenge ! They will sleep on shore, but just now they are coming aboard. Therefore lie down."

The brown-eyed lad fell back listlessly in his first position. The master of the vessel stumbled past without noticing him. He paid little attention either to Juanito, simply ordering him to take some bedding ashore, and the cooking utensils. Then securing the bag of money and a bottle of *aguardiente*, and casting a glance around to see that the vessel was in proper trim, he and Manuel rejoined the cook and the helmsman on the beach.

It was at about three o'clock in the morning that Juanito crept quietly to the bows, a sharp knife in his hand. Twenty minutes later, or thereabouts, the white stranger, still lying under the lee-rail, heard a soft splash in that direction ; then the young Mexican came aft to him, and grasping his arm, motioned him to look over the rail. He raised himself painfully. He could see that the black cliffs seemed moving past them. It was with a faintly-perceptible motion, at first, but soon

the white line of sand grew blurred, then dimmer and more dim, finally fading away completely in the darkness. The clear brown eyes turned upon the boy inquiringly. Juanito chuckled, and rubbed his hands :

“Do you know what I did? No? I cut the cable !”

“You and I are free, then?” murmured the prisoner, also in Spanish.

“Free? Yes! Only not so fast. Old Antonio has his rifle. And how would you like to hear a bullet singing over you, or boring a hole through you, perhaps? *I* have heard old 'Tonio's bullets hiss and sing; yes, and they were *sent after me*, too. *Si, señor Americano*; my old master stops not to think when *he* feels anger; he fires at you first; perhaps then he reflects—who knows! Señor, I am different; it is not a very little that makes me in anger; but then I wait and think long how I can best pay back. We will not pay back for throwing me into the sea, and for dragging *el señor* from his island? O, no! He will not feel the loss of his good sloop, with its cargo of fish and turtle-

shell? O, no! And he will not miss the faithful Juanito, either, who has done his bidding these many years? O, no!"

Juanito looked as though revenge was sweet.

"It is sometimes better not to take revenge, my friend," said the weak voice at his elbow, dreamily.

Juanito stared at him. Even the *padre*, priest of the village where he was born, stood on his defence and retaliated. But his companion was too weary to talk, even to return his gaze. He showed no anxiety, no interest in his own fate. Juanito desisted from questioning him, and crept softly below. Just before dawn he came again, bringing with him food and drink. The "North American" mechanically roused to take the nourishment, and with a grateful sigh he acknowledged Juanito's cold sponging of his face and hands and neck. Then he seemed to look about him, scanning the open sea with interest.

They had drifted out of sight of the shore-line of the island by this time, although not out of sound of its surf which beat upon the rocks with a dull roar. The night-breeze still blew brisk in the

channel between island and mainland, and they slowly drifted within its influence. Then, when Juanito thought the creaking of the blocks could not reach the shore, he hoisted the sail, carefully, an inch at a time, his prisoner getting on his feet to assist. The craft felt the new impulse, and moved more swiftly; the wind was from the east, and blowing them farther and farther from the island.

Placing the stranger at the helm, with directions to shape a course northwardly, Juanito, in obedience to his sailor instinct, proceeded to make everything ship-shape on deck; but presently he came aft again. The gray of dawn was now taking the place of the star-lit darkness, and he extinguished their light, which had been anxiously guarded. "We will watch with our own eyes for land and enemies, *amigo*," said he.

There was need to watch. Mugerres, the island on which the crew had been left in slumber, was not entirely desolate; a fishing village lay on the other side, and Juanito knew this, and also that the old captain would lose no time in crossing the

long stretch of scrub-forest that lay between him and the village to secure a vessel for pursuit.

He also knew that the deserted mariners would not awake till daylight, and that it would take them at least three hours to reach the village. Perhaps, at least he hoped so, still another hour would be wasted in securing a boat. He calculated, then, upon having nearly half a day's start of his pursuers; but he knew that he must rely more upon his knowledge of the inlets and lagunas of the coast, than upon the sailing qualities of the sloop, which was not by any means a fast one.

The day passed and night fell again. Unless they wished to sail up into the unknown expanse of the Gulf of Mexico, they should now change their course; but instead, Juanito held the more northwardly, till midnight, in order to baffle the enemy, who knew the coast even better than they did. Then he changed again, due southwest now, having reached a point nearly one hundred miles from land.

As they sat together after putting the sloop about, Juanito suddenly interrogated his prisoner :

"What does *el señor Americano* call himself?"

"My name," the American answered, "is John — John North."

"Juan Norte; and mine, too, is John — Juanito. Juanito Alcantara, *señor, al servicio de usted* — at your service. And what was *el señor* doing down here in Cozumel? For what was he waiting in Cozumel? Why did the chief of the Sublevados pay great *pesos* to rid Cozumel of *el señor*, a boy like me?"

"Christobal!" cried the American with interest. "Was this ship in the service of Christobal?"

Juanito told the story of the drugged chocolate, and gave him Antonio's account. The young prisoner smiled at the great chief's fears, but as Juanito talked he revolved many things in his mind, and half resolved that there should be an "army" and an "invasion" not of soldiers, as the great Maya chief had feared, but of scientists and explorers — an army with torches and spades. Once more he would behold his little Princess Xia and her brother, and this time he would remain and give the Silver City a strong and wise government. His heart beat high at the thought of the

true and tender and trustful young Princess. "With Xia and Zan, and their people, will I abide," said he. Ah! what a dream! Sitting there on deck of the kidnapped sloop, with no human being in reach except this golden-skinned young Mexican, how was he to reach home and secure the money and the men for explorations in Yucatan! Mysterious and terrible Yucatan! O for money! A million was not too much!

With a sigh he turned back to Juanito: "Why was I left in Cozumel? Because I *would* be left. I had an unredeemed promise to the United States Government. I had promised the Government specimens of the birds of Yucatan. I staid to do it. I had nearly done it. I should have shipped them North within the year. Now you have undone my work. You have burned my specimens, my journals, my three years' work! My future too, and the future of others!"

"What will *el señor* do?" said Juanito humbly.

"*El señor*" set his white teeth. "I will go back to Cozumel," said he. "But I will first go home for men and money."

"I will get money for *el señor*, and I will be one man for him," said Juanito.

John smiled. But Juanito's soft big black eyes were fixed on him gravely. "I can serve *el Norte Americano*," he said.

John smiled again, and patted the bronze hand that lay on the gunwale as he might have patted the head of a dumb, loving dog or horse.

They sailed for days, taking watch and watch, sleeping and waking by turn. But at last, one afternoon, the Mexican came and said, "Another night and one part of a day and we shall sail into River Coatzacoalcos. There we come beyond reach of my master."

"And when we have reached a port will my friend Juanito send word to Antonio that his property is there, waiting to be restored to him?"

The Mexican looked at him steadily for a space.

"*Señorito*, 'Little Master,'" said he, "you are older than Juanito. You have had learning set before you in the schools. You have had father and mother to teach you good from the bad. Juanito has had no school; nobody cared; only Antonio

took him that he might have one to work for him, to do for nothing what others do for pay. Ten years Juanito has served Antonio. Faithfully Juanito has served him. What has Juanito to-day?"

The boy stood erect, with his great black eyes overflowing with emotion, and pointed to his scant and ragged garments. "This is all, *señorito* — all that Antonio has given for ten years' service!"

It afterward transpired that the boy had been for years as a slave to the turtle-catcher; this was his first break for liberty. It was but fair, to his mind, that he should seize the craft—if he could—as an equivalent for all the debts of the past.

His New England-born companion was touched by this plea for justice; he felt a thrill of compassion for the boy. He resolved to secure him his dues if possible. But of course the Mexican's property must be restored. But he wisely deferred further discussion until a time should come for action.

Meantime through all his conversation a name had been ringing in his ears: Coatzacoalcos.

"Why do we go to Coatzacoalcos, Juanito?"

"Because" — the boy hesitated ; "there we may escape Antonio."

"Is there no other reason?"

The streak of red in the boy's cheek spread beyond its accustomed limits. Then he answered :
"Juanito has friends there."

"At the port?"

"No; in the interior, on the *llanos*; there Juanito was born; there his ancestors lived, for nearly three hundred years."

"That is a long time."

"*Si*, my family is a very old one, *señor*."

"Old as the Conquest?"

"More than that," answered Juanito; "before the Spaniards came here my people ruled this region. Does 'Little Master' know about the Conquest?"

"Yes; I have read of it in history."

"Then he knows that Cortez, the Great Captain, came here; even just here; he sailed along this very coast; he landed at Tabasco."

"Yes, Juanito, I know; it was in 1519."

"Then the *señorito* knows that when he came to

Coatzacoalcos he was met by some of our caciques, who presented him with a beautiful Indian maiden?"

"Yes, Juanito; it was the most romantic episode of that gloomy campaign. And she was a blessing to Cortez and the Spaniards, this Indian maiden, for she served them as interpreter and brought over to their cause many other Indians."

"*Amigo*, you tell it well, better than Juanito can, because he has not seen it in the books; Juanito had it from the stories told him by the old ones. But Malinche, the beautiful Indian girl, was a princess of Tabasco, was she not? She followed the fortunes of *el capitan*, Cortez, faithfully, did she not? and then, after the wars were over, returned to her own land, to her own native town, and there dwelt in honor, did she not?"

"Yes, Juanito, you and history agree."

Juanito's eyes were glowing, his form dilated, and his handsome face was alive with feeling.

"Malinche was of royal blood. Antonio often laughed at me because I claimed her as my ancestor and was proud of it."

"Do you mean, Juanito, that you are a descendant of Malintzin, the heroine of the Conquest?" cried John, thrilled with the most romantic astonishment.

"*Si, señorito*; and in her own town, on the land that once was hers, I, Juanito, lived, when a child." Then a fierce gleam lit up his face, and he added: "But *how* did Juanito live there? Does the *señorito* know? No? He lived there as the child of slavery! *Si!*" This last word was hissed forth, as a serpent might have uttered it. "*Si!* On the land once his family's own, secured to it by the country Malinche saved to the Spaniards; taken from it by sons of those same Guachupines, and with it our freedom; *Maldición!*"

John gazed at the lad. This was most stirring, most strange! But why should it not be true? Juanito was a handsome lad, as fine in form and feature as the cherished young Prince of the Silver City. He took his hand. "Heaven help us both!" said he gently, in Spanish. "Let us stand by each other."

He left him at the helm and went forward to tend

the sail. But when he returned, Juanito's excitement had not gone down. His dark face was almost beautiful with its glows and reds as he turned to John, and spoke rapidly: "Does *el señorito* wish *much* for money?"

"Yes," said the "Little Master," with a smile, "that he does."

"Juanito means immense riches; gold and silver by the ton; so much that the 'Little Master' might build a Silver City himself."

John laughed. "I shouldn't mind being as rich as even that, Juanito."

"The richest mine in the world—would that tempt Little Master to take a long journey?"

"Probably."

"Will he take it at once?"

"As soon as the existence of this magic mine shall be made clear to him," laughed the Little Master.

"But it *is* clear. At least it can be with the help of *señorito*."

"You speak in riddles, Juanito. Come now, tell me to what mine do you refer?"

"My friend has heard of *el rey* Montezuma?"

"Of course he has heard of that famous Mexican," said John. He turned now to Juanito with more attention than he had as yet shown.

"He was the great King of the Aztecs," went on the young Mexican with kindling eye. "He had gold, gold, gold, chambers of yellow gold. Where did he get it, Little Master?"

"I have heard," replied John, "that he got it from the mines of Malinaltepec. My father told me much of these same mines, Juanito. My father was for many years a prisoner among the fierce Lacandones. There he learned much of the secret of the Aztec treasure. When he went home to the North, he left me the description of the mines. I used to dream sometimes in Cozumel that I would go and search for them. But I always saw many obstacles in the way; I cannot speak the language of the Indians of the country holding mines, and now I have lost the clue my father gave me. You burned it, Juanito."

"What was the clue, *señorito*?"

"It was a book, written by Cortez, the con-

queror, and in it were described the mines of Montezuma, and the way to them."

"*Dios, mio, señorito!* Then if we had that book how easy all our desires would be fulfilled?"

"I do think we together might possibly have found the ancient mines," said John.

"But why not try without that book? Juanito knows all the Indian knows about the treasure-vaults; he can speak the Zapotec, that is spoken by the Indians of the hills; and he knows the direction to reach that region. More than this, *Amigo*, look!" He thrust his hand into his bosom and drew out a little leather case, which was suspended about his neck by a string. "Always I carry this with me; it has in it the proof of my descent from Malinche, and it has—but let *señorito* trust me. It was a gift from a great chieftain of the hills to Malinche. It is three hundred years old and more, Little Master."

The boys talked far into the deepening afternoon. No more fascinating and romantic matter ever occupied two lads. No stranger situation could be. The most wonderful adventure was

possible. They were already so near the coast that another hour would land them on the mysterious historical shores. The slant rays of the sinking sun bathed a white sail and the glistening walls of a town in golden sheen.

CHAPTER III.

FREEDOM FOR JUANITO.

A NARROW inlet broke the line of coast ahead of them. This inlet, Juanito remembered, led to a placid lagoon behind the sand-hills. So he stood in for the bar at its mouth, guiding his course by the foam flashes of the breakers, and dexterously threading the narrow and winding channel. Finally gliding into smooth water, behind the *medanos*, or sand-hills, they felt a security they had not experienced for several days.

“We can rest now, Little Master,” said Juanito; “and if that sail we saw should follow, and should chance to be an enemy — I suppose the great bird-hunter can use a rifle!”

Once they thought they heard the flapping of sails, and hoarse shouts; but no further noise disturbed them, and they went to sleep.

When they awoke, it was broad day ; the tropic sun was laughing at them over the tree-tops. "*Señorito*," said Juanito, "Little Master—I call you that because you are the leader-born—the wind is rising, and we should at once sail."

A town lay at the mouth of the Coatzacoalcos ; but this they managed to avoid by taking a swampy passage leading out of the western end of the lagoon. Emerging they entered the great river, and aimed to reach another town, twenty miles higher up, which, Juanito said, was called Minatitlan. The current was swift and the wind fitful, as great trees rose high above the swampy shores, and they were obliged often to labor for hours at the oars. Late in the afternoon they reached the town, five hundred miles distant from the island they had drifted from the week before. It was not an attractive village, being mostly Indian huts. But they were not travellers looking for attractions ; the village was the starting-point for a long overland journey into the interior. It was the first stepping-stone, in fact, across the unknown distance between them and the misty region of gold.

They drew up to the rotting wharf, both too busy to notice a man apparently in waiting; a man who looked at the two young sailors as though sighting along a rifle-barrel.

Juanito suddenly saw him. "As I thought!" exclaimed he. "That boat in sight, as we entered the inlet, held Antonio and Manuel. So, Little Master."

"Welcome, *caballeros*, welcome to Minatitlan!" That harsh and jeering voice belonged, without a doubt, to the old grizzly Antonio. He threw his head back and laughed at the sight of his ship and his slave. Another man, who had run rapidly up into the town, as Juanito and his craft had hove in sight, now came back, an *alcalde* and three rusty, ragged soldiers at his heels. They were dirty, and under-sized — these soldiers — their muskets rude rattling old weapons of a pattern quite unknown to John; but the men were backed by the majesty of the law, resistance would have been useless, and our young New Englander waited in silence. Juanito, with an imprecation, took up a rifle; but John restrained his movements

by a motion, and he dropped it, shrugged his shoulders, and the next moment was following gloomily after his companion as he climbed to the wharf.

The ferocious-visaged Indians marched them both off to the *calaboza*, or jail, a stone building with massive walls, and thrust them into a mouldy room with a single grated window, swarming with innumerable cockroaches and centipedes.

John said nothing, did nothing, for a while. He sat as if in a stupor. But Juanito, glowering at the dungeon door, sullenly occupied himself with whetting his knife upon the stones of his cell. "It is for Antonio," he muttered; "if I can get at him only, I will pay him *his* wages. He has earned wages of me. I owe him debts, large debts, Little Master."

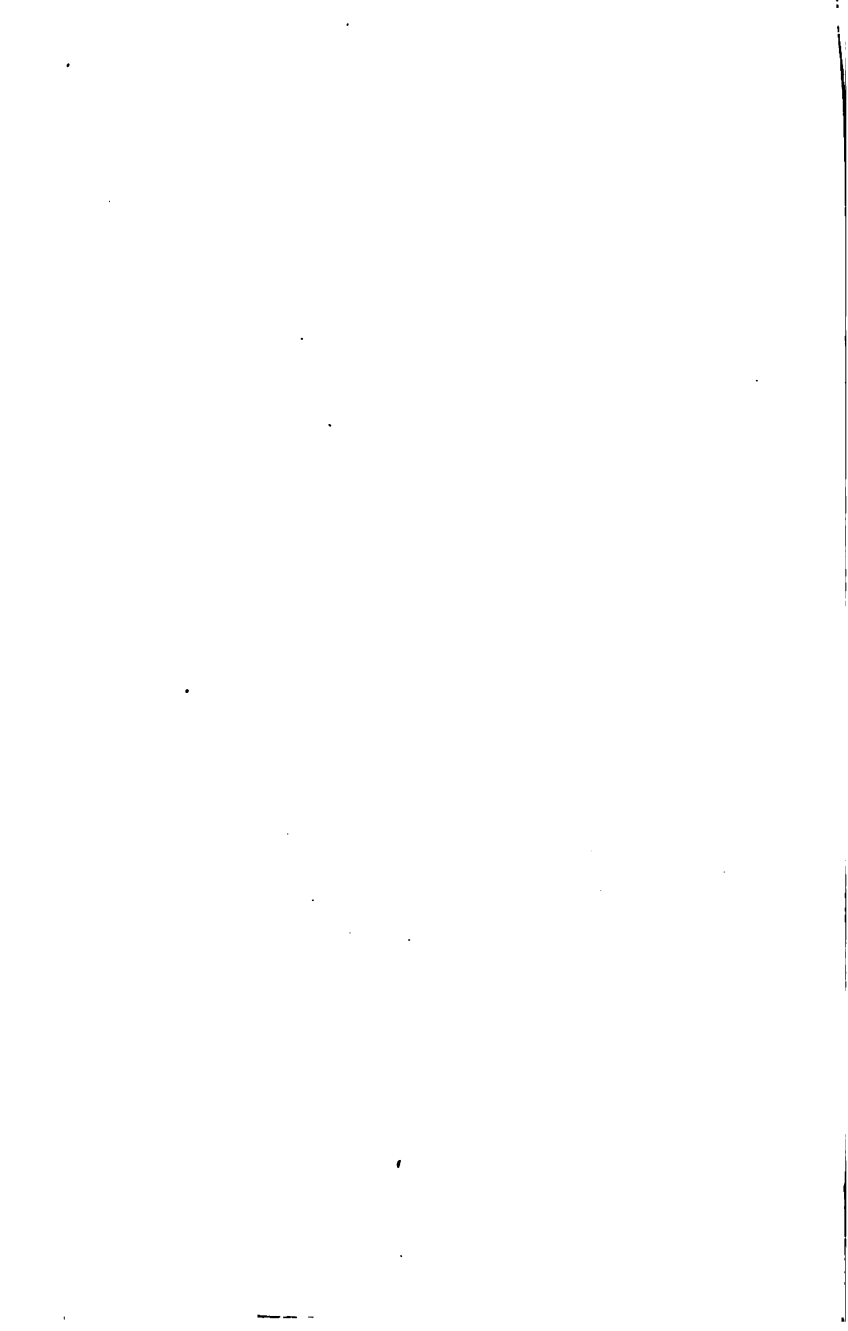
John looked at him with a gesture of disapprobation. After a moment he said, "You believe in me, Juanito? You trust me, do you not?"

"*Sí, señorito.*"

"Do you not believe that I can cope with Antonio, that I can set you free from him?"



IN CUSTODY: ON THE WAY TO THE TRIBUNAL.



Juanito hesitated; he had great faith in the young white man, but he knew Antonio. "Antonio is a crafty dog, *señorito*."

"Without doubt, Juanito. He shall do you justice, however. Revenge we do not want, do we, *amigo*?"

Amigo — "friend;" this word seemed to touch the Mexican lad. "*Amigo*," he syllabled softly, instead of replying to John. In years and years nobody had called him "friend." "*Señorito*," he said at last, laying down his knife, rising to his feet, and looking up at John, "I am not yet worthy to be called 'friend.' Juanito has yet to atone for stealing the Little Master from the Isla Cozumel. How can the Little Master trust Juanito — that Juanito who did Antonio's bidding on Cozumel — *that* Juanito?"

"Because," answered the American, "the Juanito who did Antonio's wicked work is not the one who now confesses it."

"*Es verdad*," admitted the boy, "it is true. There was a good Juanito hidden within the bad one, all the time; but he might never have come

up into the light had it not been for *señorito*. So it is that the good Juanito will ever be at his service. But the bad one thirsts for revenge upon Antonio"—he added fiercely, "thirsts! thirsts!"

They sat conversing late, then lay down to sleep upon the stone floor. No beds, no food had been provided.

Early next morning, however, the jailer came with a simple meal; and at nine o'clock he came again, followed by the *alcalde* and his soldiers, who escorted them to the tribunal before which the old turtle-catcher had brought complaint. There sat the judge, a kindly-looking old man, with white hair and moustache, and black, twinkling eyes.

Both Antonio and Manuel were there, and they sprang to their feet with a fierce scowl as the young men entered. The *alcalde*, bearing his silver-tipped wand of office, led the way into the court-room and assigned to each his place. This done, he looked about him savagely, and waved his wand, as though to say: "You see *me*, Don Mariano de la Angostura, *alcalde* of this district;

show me a bigger man, if you can." Then he sat down, and glared at everybody in general.

Antonio, corroborated frequently by Manuel, narrated how it was that his boat had been taken from him, but saying never a word as to the previous happenings of the voyage.

After this account was finished, John was called. The judge, knowing that he was an American, assumed that he could not speak Spanish, and sent out for an interpreter.

"Pardon, your honor," said John, "but I can speak Castilian a little." And then he gave, in Spanish, an account of the taking of the sloop.

The judge seemed to be captivated by his straightforward bearing, and by the purity of his speech. "Ah," he murmured, "*es Castiliano puro* — it is the Castilian of old Spain."

To the evident surprise of Antonio, John had so far confined his story solely to the seizure of the boat. But now, that told, he paused. Then fixing his gaze upon the judge, he said: "Your honor, may I ask a single question?"

"Certainly; *por su puesto* — go on."

"Your honor, I would like to ask, *What is the penalty for kidnaping?*"

"The penalty, upon good and sufficient proof is — *death!*"

John turned towards Juanito's master, who shook visibly. His face took on an ashen hue. His eyes glared, and his hand fumbled at his belt.

"*Señor Americano,*" said the judge, "you imply something serious by this question. Have you any charge to prefer against any one here?"

John hesitated. He had no desire for revenge. He did not care to drag this unhappy man to jail. Much less would he bring about his death. He was saved immediate action by the old turtle-catcher himself, who, with a fearful cry, dashed away, followed by Manuel. But they leaped through the doorway only to encounter the fixed bayonets of the three soldiers, who halted them, and then compelled them to return.

The judge eying the men sternly, again told John to prefer his complaint.

"I would rather refer them to the clemency of your honor," replied the young man.

"So it may be," said the judge, "but acquaint me with the circumstances."

Then John told the story of his enforced departure from Cozumel, such gaps in the narrative as he could not fill being bridged by Juanito.

"You have just cause for at least incarcerating these men for life," the judge said when they had finished.

"Your honor, I desire nothing for myself." Then he told the story of Juanito's long slavery. "I do ask that reparation be made this young man," he said, with sudden fire in his eyes, "for long years of unrequited servitude; and also a complete legal release from his master."

The judge reflected a few moments, shading his face with his hand. There was a humorous smile on his lips as he delivered his decision: "Señor Antonio, you received, from the savage, Christobal, seven hundred *pesos de oro* for the performance of a work that might have brought upon you the severest penalty of the law. Since this generous stranger waives his right to complain against you, I may release you from certain legal consequences

of that deed, but on conditions : What have you to say against forfeiting your ill-gotten gold ? ”

Antonio's features writhed with the anguish of one having his heart-strings severed ; but he said nothing.

“ However,” continued the upright Mexican, “ in view that you have suffered much inconvenience by the loss of your boat for a time, and have been at some expense, I merely order that you divide equally with your companions the sum given you, and give to your former servant, Juanito, a release forever from service.”

There was no appeal from this decision. Before they left the hall, the money was divided, and the papers drawn up and signed, by which Juanito received absolute freedom.

It should be explained, in this connection, that in Mexico (even at the present day, although slavery was abolished sixty years ago) thousands of Indians are held in bondage. For by Mexican law, if one of them incur a debt, he must repay it with his labor. The landed proprietors, the owners of *Haciendas*, or large estates, thus hold their

peones, or laborers, by a grip as strong as ever existed in days of legal slavery. They take good care that their servants never get out of debt, and ever remain slaves. Even death does not release these victims, for their obligations descend upon their children, and through them to their remote descendants. One of Juanito's ancestors had been made the victim of this iniquitous law, through the conspiracy of the Spanish rulers, and hence his family had rested under the ban of peonage. It was through purchase of this obligation that Antonio had acquired possession of Juanito, while other Mexicans held other members of his family. By the sentence of the Minatitlan judge, the lad was now rendered a free man, forever released from all claims, and in full possession of his rights. He was so stupefied at his good fortune, that he could only cling to his *padron's* hand, and kiss it gratefully.

But when it came to the division of Christobal's gold, Juanito refused to take the portion counted out to him; he would have none of it — it was the price of a crime. Nor would he take it in consid-

eration of his ten years of toil. But let Antonio look to himself! if ever he crossed his path!

"My son," protested the judge, "I shall take this money for you. I will give your friend here a receipt—the time will come when you will see fit to call for the gold and will be able to make good use of it. What is your name?" He paused, pen in hand.

"Juanito Alcantara, your worship," answered the lad, still glowering at his old master.

"Alcantara! What! But surely not of the family of Tuxtla!"

"The same, your worship!"

"Mother of Mercy!" cried the judge. "What wrong that a descendant of our Princess should have been in slavery. May God requite your sorrows!"

He evidently regarded the lad with interest from this moment. "Jesu!" he muttered, turning away. "And this in the native province of his noble ancestress! What wrong! what injustice! No wonder is it that the gentle spirit of the great Princess walks the old gardens of Chapultepec!"

He congratulated the young men warmly on their escape from the turtle-catcher, plainly believing that John had been destined for as bad a fate as Juanito's. "*Dios mio!*" he exclaimed again, addressing John, "that the descendant of the kind Malinche, of the noble Knight Jaramillo—he of the *conquistadores*—should have served as a fisherman's slave! He belongs in the royal city, in the Street of Medinas! The blood of the Aztec Princess shows in his cheek and in his eye—see!"

In truth Juanito had flushed and kindled as he heard the judge recount his historic ancestry, and brow and cheek flamed anew now at the sense of his long slavery. "I hate like the Spaniard!" he cried out fiercely. "I cannot forgive like the generous Malinche—no! no, not yet!" he added, meeting John's eyes.

The romantic story of Donna Marina, the Aztec interpretest for the *conquistadores*, had long ago been familiar to John in the pages of Prescott, and now the strange incidents came one by one back into his remembrance as he sat in the dingy

old Mexican law-court. Was this golden-skinned youth indeed a descendant of a royal standard-bearer of the time of Cortez and the Conquest—Don Juan Jaramillo, one of Cortez's Castilian Knights? This living paragraph of old history almost confused his brain, intimate with romance as he had been in Yucatan. His proposed quest for the lost gold mines appeared to him, for the moment, a fantasy. He reverted to the old New England farmhouse, his father and mother and brother, and questioned his own sanity.

Meanwhile he was listening to the courteous words of the high-minded old Mexican judge. "You are here strangers, and worse. My house, then, is at your disposal while you make your plans. My advice and assistance also are at your service."

After a moment's reflection, John confided to him that they had intended to go upon a journey of exploration, more or less extended, into the interior.

The judge told them to bring their effects from the vessel, while he would send out to find them

some trusty canoemen, since the river was their route for the present.

Manuel and Antonio had disappeared as soon as released ; but with a soldier the young men overtook them before they had launched the boat, and they were made to deliver over Juanito's few possessions. They did this with ill-grace. They swore, as soon as they were safe in mid-stream, that they would be amply revenged for all their trouble.

"Let it so stand," cried Juanito, hurling back their taunts; "but remember that I too have accounts to settle! You have not finished with your slave!"

CHAPTER IV.

UP THE COATZCOALCOS.

JOHN and Juanito remained guests of the judge for two days, during which time the Mexican exerted himself to the utmost to forward their plans. He engaged a great canoe with rowers, provisioned it for the journey, and gave them medicines to ward off the evil effects of the malarious climate of the lowlands. He asked no questions. But when one day they mentioned the locality they intended to explore, his black eyes twinkled: "It is a grand search, young men. Say not a word. I would join you, were it not for my age and family. I too have had my dreams. But bring to me some memento of *il rey*, if it be only a hatchet of copper." They promised, laughingly, to bring him one of the largest nuggets of gold, making no effort to dispel his sagacious conclusions.

On the morning of the third day they said *adios*, and launched their canoe upon the great river, alone again, with no company but the sinewy Indians tugging at their paddles. They were on a tropical river, where palms rose on each bank, projecting their heads above the mass of vegetation that walled them in ; where vines hung from sombre trees and fell to the water — vines spangled with flowers, and odorous with a thousand blossoms ; where orchids and wild pines sat astride great branches and shot into the air their spikes of bloom, and lianas hung like cables and cordage from the leafy canopy above. The solemn, sullen river rolled on its dark flood without a sound, and the paddle-dips and cries of their boatmen alone disturbed the silence.

It was not once absent from the young commander's mind that they were voyaging through a country rich in aboriginal traditions and in memories of the Spanish Conquest, and he would gladly have halted on his journey to penetrate within and examine places where interesting events had taken place. All the region he hourly

left behind was once astir with martial music, and the forests about Tabasco and Coatzacoalcos alive with gathering hordes of angry Indians, assembled to repel the invaders. For there Cortez landed, in 1519, and had his first conflict with the natives; and there the first horses ever upon the soil of Mexico were brought into terrible contact with the Indians. Against fearful odds, fought the poor people who were thus invaded, put to defending themselves on their own soil; and when they had brought up their well-trained troops in masses and hurled them upon the Spaniards, and the strangers were about to retreat, there then appeared the apparition of the horses, Cortez's cavalry, brought from Cuba, of fiery, chestnut horses in glittering caparison. Astonished, the poor creatures gazed with awe at these fearful monsters, pawing, snorting, screaming, rearing. They had never before seen an animal larger than the tapir of their forests; and when, simultaneously, the black-mouthed cannon began playing into their ranks, they abandoned their positions, together with their freedom and

independence, and fled. Man for man, with their weak shields of quilted-cotton, they had been nearly a match for the mailed warriors of Cortez ; brave and worthy Indians under the leadership of valiant chiefs, true patriots. But the horses and the cannon appalled them, as later they appalled Montezuma himself. They sued for peace, and begged pardon of their conquerors. After Cortez's soldiers had retired, hundreds of wounded creatures — Juanito's countrymen — must have crawled into these forests to die while the smoke of their burning houses floated in the air.

This was three hundred and sixty years ago, and since that time the natives — a brave people, John knew from both Bernal Diaz and Prescott — had been more or less under the influence of the Spaniard. Juanito told him, however, that in their religion they were still more pagan than Roman Catholic, still dancing savage dances about their altars and sacred images.

While they conversed about the country and about the few inhabitants of the surrounding forests, John's trained eyes were alert. A snake, a

turtle, and occasionally an alligator, slid into the water, as the canoe passed by, making as little sound, almost, as if they had been oiled. Along the Mexican coast, especially in the shallow lagoons and at the river-mouths, John had noticed that alligators were numerous. From the Spanish name of the alligator, in fact — *el lagarto* — he knew that many places were called, like Rio Lagartos, or Alligator River, on the coast of Yucatan. The great saurian is not hunted in Mexico for its hide ; consequently, when met it is bold ; and those they saw now scarcely made way for the canoe to pass.

Three days of this water-travelling, halting at night for a camp, and pushing on rapidly soon after sunrise, brought them to a point where the stream became narrow, winding, and shallow. Here it was determined to take to the woods ; the Indian canoemen, transforming themselves into carriers, were to leave the boat hidden in the rank grass (which now overhung the water) and transport their effects two long days of travel still further into the deep and mysterious forest. It had seemed forbidding enough, as they viewed it

from the boat ; but now that they were to penetrate it, and wind their way between the slimy tree-trunks and amongst the dripping growth of vines and parasitic plants, the real obstacles of the journey seemed for the first time to appear.

Two days and nights they were buried in the gloom of the great forest ; they camped where darkness overtook them, resuming their journey at daybreak. On the afternoon of the third day, worn down with fatigue, they found a clearing in the wood, through which their trail led. The small thatched hut was surrounded by a half-wild garden thinly planted with shrubs that John had never seen before. They were about two feet high, some of them bearing small reddish flowers and some long crooked pods containing yellow seeds ; while all had curious winged leaves.

The owner of the clearing soon appeared, and was surprised at seeing strangers, and a white man amongst them. But he invited them in and set about preparing a meal. John questioned him, through his own Indians, as to the strange shrub in the garden, and was told that it was a dye-stuff.

They gave him its Aztec name, *Xiuhquilitzahuac*, and told him it grew wild throughout Tabasco, Chiapas, and Yucatan. After puzzling over it some time, it suddenly occurred to him that it was *indigo*, a native plant of the country, cultivated and in use by the aborigines before the Conquest. This indigo has several species, represented in both hemispheres, which produce the famous dye known to the ancients of Egypt and India; the Mexican species being known as *Indigofera anil*.

This clearing in the forest, letting in the sunlight amongst trees that would have been unnoticed in the general gloom of the thick woods, brought to light many species, among them mahogany and rosewood. One tree which our young naturalist noticed, growing among the rocks, with a large trunk, straggling branches, and fragrant flowers of lovely red, proved to be the rare Brazil-wood (*Caesalpina Brasiliensis*) the heart of which not only furnishes a rich red dye, but is susceptible of high polish. This poor Indian, indeed, was surrounded by precious woods that, on the coast, would have made his fortune, but here were not

worth the cutting. The crowning proof of the worthlessness of these rare and beautiful woods when far from a market, was found in the Indian's hog-pen, for it was of rosewood. Roughly-hewn slabs of this tree enclosed a small space, in which rooted and grunted a lean and long-haired animal, not half so contented in his rosewood pig-pen as he would have been freely ranging the plantation.

The Indian himself was insensible to the wonder his useless riches excited, and never looked up from his hospitable labor. When this was done, he invited John and Juanito to sit down on a mahogany log, and eat. He answered briefly all questions, but never once asked of the strangers whence they had come, where they were going, or why they had paid him this unexpected visit.

"Did you notice the Indian, when he passed us the water-gourd?" asked Juanito of John. "Did you mark how he clasped his left hand with the right, and bowed low, as he gave it to you?"

"Yes. What did he mean by it? I thought it a peculiar performance."

"He meant nothing more than his ancestors

had taught him; it is an ancient custom. It signifies that he is your servant, your most humble



IN TOKEN THAT HE WAS UNARMED.

servidor; and he clasps his hands together—the wrist of one with the hand of the other—that you

may see he has no weapon ready to stab you with. He belongs to a most peaceful tribe; but they were not always so peaceful. Once was, when they fought with the Spaniards, and they were hard to be subdued. Even when they were their servants, they were rebellious, and dangerous. So, their masters ordered that whenever they came near them they should clasp their hands together, or hold them out, in token that they were unarmed."

"He differs from our Indians, in many ways," said John. "He seems to belong to a new tribe."

"Yes, and it shows that we have nearly reached the end of our foot-march, Little Master, and are near the great *hacienda* the judge told us of, where we get horses. This man is a *Zoque*, belonging to a tribe living on the skirts of the hills we seek to penetrate. Let me question him.

The Indian seemed surprised. "Why, *maestros*, you are even there; a day's march further shows you *el hacienda grande*."

"Are there horses there? Can we find *caballos* for a journey over the hills?

"*Caballos ! hay millones, maestros ; millones !*"

"Let us go on at once," urged John. "I am anxious to get astride a horse and find this great and gloomy forest behind me."

But Juanito objected. It was late in the day; he thought it better to stop with the Indian, and make the trip by daylight. "Juanito know this land best," he said proudly. He yielded, however, to John's arguments. Giving the hospitable Indian a silver-piece, they were about to depart, when he stopped them.

"The *señores* had better not camp in the forest. Here is the cabin of their servant; let them take and occupy it, he will himself give it for their use solely. In the forests are serpents — *muchos serpientes* — more than a rod in length; and *los tigres* which devour all travellers by night."

"The Zoque speaks truly," said Juanito; "the forest ahead of us, as it is higher up, holds more of wild beasts; it is better to stop, Little Master."

But John laughed and shouldered his rifle. Juanito, with a flash of wrath from his black eyes, took up his and, motioning the Indian carriers to follow them, strode into the wood. After two

hours' tramp they entered an opening, where a little stream flowed beneath some giant trees. It seemed a good place for a camp, and they threw down their burdens. A fire was built, chocolate was boiled, and as darkness descended they were ready for the hammocks already stretched between the trees, when the faithful friend said, "Juanito hopes Little Master may wake on the morrow."

"O," laughed John, "these are not my first nights by a forest fire. You forget my experiences in Yucatan."

Those experiences in Yucatan! Again the tale was told for the Mexican lad, and again they discussed the plan of a forced return to the Silver City. Then they reverted to the lost gold mines of Montezuma, and speculated upon the chances of finding the book of Cortez. "I mentioned the book to the judge," said John, "but though he has a fair library himself, he had never seen this volume. He had heard, however, of it, in the library of the Institute at Vera Cruz; and if it should seem absolutely necessary we *could* make a journey there and read it."

"It might save us time, then," said Juanito. "Who can tell? Juanito can lead to the region of gold, but he may be months seeking the mine's mouth. Yet that too Juanito *can* do."

John lay long awake, looking up into the leafy canopy overhead, a covering so dense and dark that no portion of the sky could be seen. His thoughts went back to his first meeting with the boy. He admired his courage and pride, and admitted that there must be great native goodness in him—some drop of Donna Marina's generous blood—to survive the base, hard treatment of the past ten years. He would do all in his power to develop his better qualities and to shape his future.

With this renewed resolution, John endeavored to shut his eyes for sleep; but they persistently fastened upon a bright thing, like a diamond, glistening in the tree above; it might have been a drop of water; but it glittered more brightly moment by moment and seemed to move slightly as now his steady eyes regarded it. He could even believe, at last, this diamond drop to be set in a round and glistening head, which presently length-

ened itself into a dark and sinuous body, winding about the thick branches of the tree in countless convolutions. But now an oppressive sense of sleep long deferred asserted its claims, weighed his eyelids down, and he closed them, at last, and slumbered heavily.

Had he remained awake he would have seen the diamond disappear, the convolutions separate, and again combine, the dark body glide lower and lower. He saw nothing, however; and knew nothing, until wakened by a sense of suffocation. Then he shouted hoarsely, as he struggled to free himself from the slowly-compressing folds that enwrapped him : " Juanito ! Juanito ! "

CHAPTER V.

FOREST, CAMP, AND SADDLE.

JUANITO!" The cry was half stifled, but the young Indian heard it, and leaped from his hammock. The carriers also sprang up and darted towards the spot indicated by the voice. It was so dark they could scarce distinguish the writhing bulk of the boa from the human form it had enclosed, and they hurriedly lighted torches at the smoldering embers of the fire. They were not startled by the sight that then met them, for they lived in a land of serpents; but they uttered cries of sympathy for *el capitan*, as he lay, helpless, motionless, within that horrid coil. The weight of the boa had dragged one end of the hammock to the ground, and John was entangled in its meshes, as well as held fast by the serpent which raised its head when the Indians approached,

and opened its flexible jaws as if to engulf its prey at once. There was no time to lose, and they lost none, but with their great forest knives hacked at head and tail until the proud crest drooped and the scaly coils loosened. Juanito had guided the Indians, fearlessly seizing the supple neck and endeavoring to drag the head away from such close contact with his master's face. Now extricating John's senseless figure, with the help of the Indians he bore it to the bank of the stream.

John proved to be not severely injured, however, though sprained and bruised, and he sat up with his men the rest of the night about the campfire, not caring to seek the hammock again, and at the first signs of daylight they turned their backs upon the tragic spot and took up the line of march for the *hacienda*. It was slow and painful marching to John, at least, but he bore it in silence, realizing that his bruises and sprains had been caused by his own obstinacy in refusing to listen to advice, a fact upon which Juanito generously forbore to comment.

At noon, they emerged upon the skirts of a clearing, and a vast plain lay before them, green with springing grass and dotted in every direction with horses and cattle. Far off, in the midst of this plain, they could see the white walls of the *hacienda* to which they had been directed. This they reached about sunset, approaching its great walls with feelings of joy and relief, for they had good reason to expect shelter and food, as Juanito assured them that no person was ever yet turned away from a Mexican farmhouse when in search of either.

They were not disappointed; they were overcome, in truth, by their reception. Halting on the flags of the broad veranda, they sent in by a *mozo* (or man-servant) the letter given them by the Mexican judge at Minatitlan. It seemed but a moment, and that the *mozo* had had hardly time to traverse the hall, before the *haciendado* appeared, the letter in his hand, and hastened toward them with beaming face.

“Is it the Señor Norte that I address?” he said, holding out his hand, and then embracing John,

throwing both arms about him, first with his head over one shoulder, then over the other, and all the time patting him on the back with both hands and pouring forth inquiries after his health and the health and welfare of his friends at Minatitlan — this was John's first experience of a Mexican welcome. Juanito received only a pat on the shoulders.

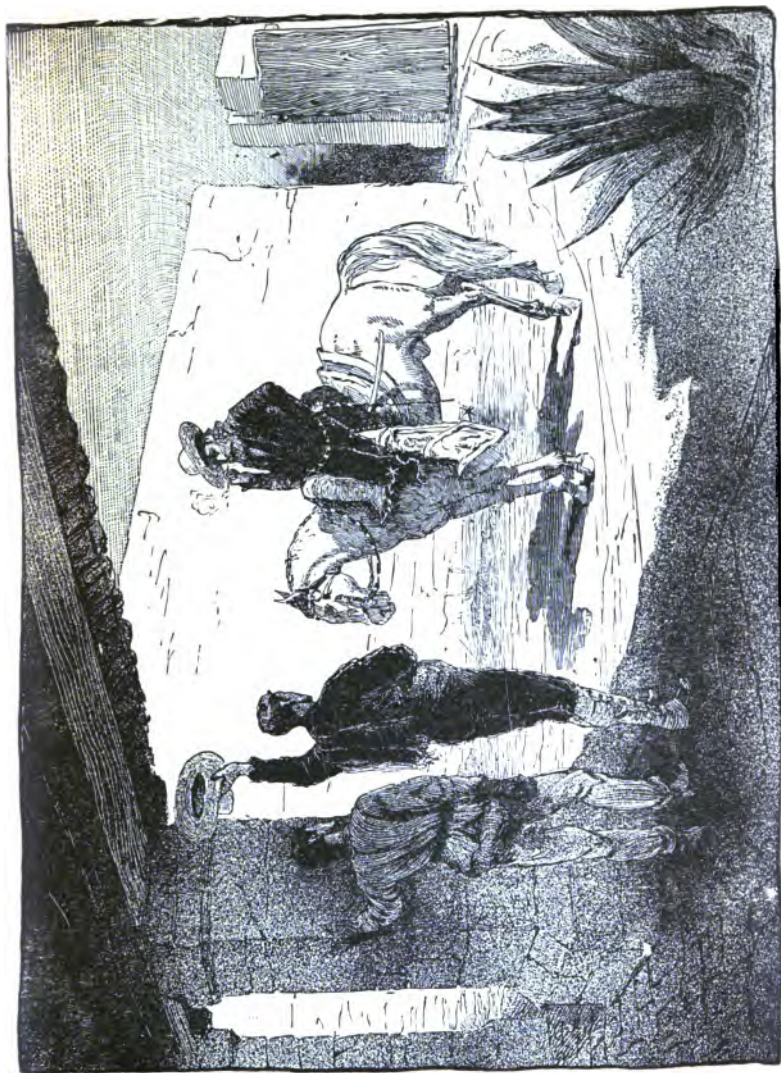
They followed Don Augustino within — that was his name — Don Augustino Diaz del Campo, as he told them with many a wave of his hand, and adding with his hand on his heart, "*servidor de ustedes* — your humble servant, whose house is entirely at your disposal, and all there is in it — *mi casa esta muy á en disposicion, señores, y todo que lo contiene.*"

This fine announcement turned out to be no idle Spanish compliment either. A bountiful dinner was soon spread before his guests by Don Augustino; a dozen courses, ending with frijoles, or beans of the country, and coffee, from his own plantation. Then, seeing that they were exceedingly weary, he sent them off to bed, with a hearty

benas noches, declaring that though he was on the point of perishing for news from the coast he would wait till the morrow.

Their sleep was of the soundest, even though John soon dreamed himself into a conflict with a boa-constrictor, and awoke two or three times, bathed in perspiration, and with a choking sensation. The morning found them refreshed, and they appeared on the veranda just as Don Augustino rode up on a powerful horse from making the rounds of his plantation—or rather, from receiving the reports of his overseers. Coffee was brought them, and then it took half the day to satisfy Don Augustino with news, for he had seen no white man from the coast in nearly a twelve-month; and had not been off his *hacienda* in twice that length of time.

This was our New Englander's first view of a *hacienda* outside of books. As he talked with Don Augustino, he looked around him with interest. The house was of stone, long, low, massive, with a broad veranda on two sides, and divided into numerous great, bare, cool rooms. At a respectful



DON AUGUSTINO ARRIVES FROM "MAKING THE ROUNDS."



distance an immense wall surrounded it, so high that nobody could climb over, so strong that nothing much short of an earthquake could shake it down, and so white that you could hardly look at it when the sun shone on it. A great gateway gave entrance to the space within by day, but at night a barred and bolted gate closed out all intruders. Under the shelter of the wall within were the lowly huts of the *peones*, the laborers, nominally servants, but in reality the slaves of the proprietor. Yet they seemed contented, these swarms of Indians who labored for Don Augustino, and were, perhaps, willing to be in debt, so long as they were never called upon for payment in anything except the labor of their hands. The *hacienda* seemed as strongly built as if intended for a fortress, and Don Augustino assured him that it was considered necessary as Mexico was a land of *pronunciamientos*—or revolutions, and that any day a revolutionary chief might appear before the walls and demand heavy tribute. The Don took this state of affairs lightly, however; and he confessed to having more acres of land than he had

ever visited, and more cattle and horses than he had ever counted. As for his Indian *peones*, he took no note of their number, but let them come and go, and draw their rations at their own sweet will. He lived alone in his great house, and he strongly urged the young men to stay with him, promising to give them horses and land enough to satisfy the most covetous and to enable them to pass their lives in ease.

But it was not a tempting offer to either John or Juanito, and after a week of rest and pleasure with the kind *haciendado*, they signified their intention of departing. They had already mentioned that they should need horses to ride and a mule to carry their luggage, and Don Augustino had promised to supply them. He took them out into the corral now and bade them take their choice, saying they could have any animals they fancied.

The corral was full of horses and colts, a hundred or more, and it was a difficult matter to select; so the major-domo (the farm overseer) drove up two beautiful mares, a black one and a chestnut, saying they were as good as any in the

herd, and these were saddled and picketed in the yard in front of the house. The Don took a quiet sort of pride in his horses, saying that many of them were of almost pure Arab blood, and some of them descendants of those magnificent steeds brought over by the first Spaniards during the early years of the Conquest. John's mare, the chestnut, was carefully trained in a peculiar trot called the *passo*, in which the rider is hardly moved in his seat. The art of training a horse to this pace, the Don explained, came down from the *conquistadores*—the warriors of Cortez. It was acquired by means of a peculiar caparison—a heavy leather housing called the *anquera*, which covered the hips and descended to the legs, and was fringed with sharp nails that struck the horses legs when trotting and caused the mincing gait called the *passo*. A rope bridle with its cruel bit was slipped over the mare's head and a peaked Mexican saddle placed on its back, and then the steed was ready for the rider. Juanito's horse was likewise equipped, and a lasso was hung to each saddle and a Mexican blanket, or *serape*, rolled up and

strapped behind the seat. The boys hung their carbines at the side, suspended from straps in front of the pommels, and felt fully equipped—gallant young *conquistadores* themselves. After an experimental gallop, they returned to the house, divested the horses of their trappings, and selected their mule.

This done, John, with much trepidation—for he feared they had taken better beasts than his means would allow—asked Don Augustino how much he was to pay for this outfit. They were sitting on the veranda, sipping their evening chocolate, John and Juanito one side the table and Don Augustino on the other. He looked up, as John asked, and frowned. “Did *el Americano* expect to pay for the beasts?” he demanded.

“I—I meant to, of course, if—if you—if I have money enough.”

“Then you have *not* money enough,” he growled.

The young man's heart sank; he feared he had made a great mistake in accepting such fine animals; he wished he had taken *burros*, or donkeys, since they were almost valueless.

"But how much?" he persisted.

"Nothing!"

"Señor?"

"I say *nothing*; not a *centaro*; the horses are yours. *Caramba!* Such a fuss over two horses and a mule!"

"But, *señor*, they are valuable, and so are their saddles and trappings."

"*Caballos* — I have a thousand, more or less; and as for saddles — my *peones* can make me more when I get short."

They stared at him in astonishment, until he fairly laughed them out of their surprise and reluctance. "Señor Juan el Norte, you are giving me a bad opinion of your countrymen; are they all beggars in your country? do they not entertain the stranger as the Mexican?"

"Rather less lavishly," answered John.

"As for Juanito here, there is excuse," said the Don, with a half-sneer; "he was brought up on the coast, where everybody suspects everybody else, and where hospitality is a thing they have forgotten; yet he ought to have known that a

great *haciendado* would refuse pay for three paltry *caballos*. Still," added he, "as you want to repay me, tell me fairly where you are going, and for what, and I am rewarded."

"Certainly, *señor*, we would have done so long since. You had but to ask," replied John with a light laugh. "We will tell you without reserve, for we may never return, and then you and the Judge could institute some inquiries. You probably have heard of those ancient mines that are said to be in the mountains beyond the great forests? Juanito tells me the tradition is general."

"Yes, yes, of course. I have heard those tales all my life; but what consequence? Indian stories are not to lean upon. No one cares to search."

"But this Indian story is confirmed," said John, partly to quiet Juanito's rising wrath; "the *conquistadores* themselves have left a description of the country and the mines, at the time of their discovery."

"So? that would be a different matter. But have you seen any of these writings? have you them with you?"

•

"No, *señor*, but my father has read the account by Cortez himself, in an old, old manuscript he once found in Tabasco; and he told me of a volume containing the accounts, and that it could be found in the archives of the City of Mexico, if nowhere else."

"And what was it called, Don Juan? what was the book he had read?"

"It was called the *Letters of Cortez*, and was printed within five years after the Conquest—the first portion of it; one of the oldest books in Spain."

"Hold!—*Cartas de Cortez*, 'Letters of Cortez'—where have I seen that book? Somewhere." The *haciendado* leaned his head upon his hand and fell to thinking, shaking his head negatively as reminiscence after reminiscence came up, but not the right one; at last—"I have it! In that old convent of Santa Cruz; we found it deserted; all the monks were gone; the French had just sacked it; I was a *guerillero*, then—a free-lance—fighting for my country. We strolled through the cloisters and the empty halls, and in the library we found hundreds of books, in parchment bindings

and vellum ; most of them were religious books, and all of them very old. But one took my fancy, and that was this very book you mention—yes, the *Cartas de Cortez* ! ”

“ Did you take it ? What did you do with it ? ”
his listeners eagerly chimed in chorus.

“ Did I take it ? Of course I did. ”

“ But what became of it ? ”

“ As to what became of it, that is another matter. But I am sure I brought it home with me. I was taken by the title, for I had read when I was a boy the *Conquest of Mexico* by Bernal Diaz, one of the captains under Cortez, and here was the same story, told by the great captain himself. Yes, I brought it home with other books, and I believe that I read it, and now I certainly do remember something said about some mountain mines. ”

“ O, Señor Augustino, cannot you recollect at all *what* was said ; where they were located ? ”

“ No ; it was years ago, more than a score. But why wrangle here when the old book itself may be around to tell the story. ”

"It is not in your library," said John, "because I looked when you gave me permission to examine your collection of books."

"Let us ask the major-domo out there if he knows of any books lying about. Ho! Pedro!" The overseer hastened to his side. "Pedro, where are those old books we brought away from the convent, now twenty years ago?"

"*Maria Santissima!* most noble master; do you expect old Pedro to keep account of rubbish? And has not the cook been feeding the fires with them this twelvemonth past?"

"You rascal! Do you mean to say they are gone — all gone?"

"*Sin duda*, señor — without a doubt."

Don Augustino, however, took the young men with him to a room in a deserted wing of the great building.

"*Alla!* there!" said he, pointing to a heap of papers in a corner; "if it is yet alive, your book will be there."

The boys sprang at the musty pile. They pulled out, one after another, several large vol-

umes of old religious works, which comprised all that were in a condition to be handled. They were turning away, disappointed, when the *haciendado* turned over a mouldy parchment-covered volume that had but half its leaves remaining. He stooped with an exclamation of joy: "Here, what is this? *Cartas de Cortez*, or my eyes deceive me. Shake the dust off and let's see!"

John and Juanito shouted, for it was the very volume that within the last few weeks they had so often wished to see.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIVER WITH GOLDEN SANDS.

LEAF by leaf, one fragment after another was exhumed from the dusty mass until the old book finally lay nearly complete on the floor before them.

“*Vamonos!* come back to the veranda, and let us examine the treasure,” said the owner. “Don Juan, as you are versed in history, and we poor Mexicans are not, you shall read to us. But first, if you know, tell us something about these *Cartas*. Why were they written?”

“Of course, Don Augustino,” said John, “you are acquainted with the history of your own country sufficiently to know that Cortez and his companions sailed along the Mexican coast, in 1519; and that he landed, and fought his way up to the Valley of Mexico, where, on an island in

Lake Tezcoco, in the centre of the great valley, the Aztecs dwelt in their beautiful city of Tenochtitlan. They were numerous and powerful, and ruled by the great king, Montezuma, who received the Spaniards with pomp and magnificence, inviting them into the city, where they were entertained in the palace of Axaycatl, the king who had preceded Montezuma. He treated them like princes, and they requited his generosity by making him a prisoner, in his own city. An insurrection of his people followed, in which Montezuma was slain, and in which the Spaniards were expelled, with great slaughter. This was in 1520; in December of that year Cortez came back with reinforcements, invested the city and finally captured it, after completely destroying it and killing, it is estimated, nearly one hundred thousand Indians. While this siege and conquest was going on, at intervals of peace, Cortez wrote the famous *Letters*, which we have here. He wrote five, but we have only four, as the first is lost. The second is dated, October 15, 1520, and was printed in Spain, in Seville, October 8, 1522. The third letter was

written in May, 1522, and printed the next year ; while the fourth and last was written at the City of Mexico, in October, 1524, and printed in October, 1525. So you see they are very ancient, the oldest of them having been produced over three hundred and sixty years ago. Well," continued John, "it was with the events mentioned in his third letter, that Juanito and I have to do. In this he relates the capture of Montezuma, and the king's generosity in throwing open to them the treasure-chambers. All this golden treasure, the tribute of many provinces, the savings of royalty for generations, the Spaniards took ; and they still clamored for more. Then Montezuma offered to show them whence came these golden stores."

Here John turned to the tattered old pages which related to the mines. Juanito was fascinated by the prospect of having his statements confirmed by Cortez. Don Augustino was hardly less interested. He himself was deeply excited :

When I discovered that Montezuma was fully devoted to your highness [he is writing to the King of Spain] I re-

quested that he would point out to me the mines from which gold is obtained.

To this he consented with the greatest readiness, and immediately sent for several of his public servants and assigned them to four provinces, two to each province, in which he said the gold was obtained, and I deputed two Spaniards to accompany the same number of his own men.

One party of them went to a province called Cuzula, eighty leagues from the great city of Tenochtitlan, whose inhabitants are vassals of Montezuma, where they were shown three rivers, from all of which they brought me specimens of gold, of good quality. Another party of our envoys went to a province called Tamazulapa, which is seventy leagues from the great city, but more towards the sea-coast. They brought me gold (rich gold) from a great river that passes through it. The other party visited a region beyond this river, inhabited by a people speaking a different language from those of Culna, and called *Tenis*; whose chief ruler is a powerful *cacique*. His territory is situated on a lofty and rugged mountain range, and his people, inured to war, fight with spears twenty-five to thirty-five palms in length. He is independent of Montezuma, and the messengers with the Spaniards did not dare enter this province until they had requested permission. The *cacique* answered that he was very willing the Spaniards should enter the province, but that the *Culnas* must not do so, as they were his enemies. The Spaniards at first feared to go; but finally went, and were well received by the chief and his people, who showed them seven or eight mines in which gold was extremely abundant, and they loaded the Spaniards with all the precious metal they could

carry. And Montezuma caused to be painted, by his native artists, a chart of the country, painted on cloth, on which the coast was delineated, and a great river, called by the natives Guazacualco. The governor of this province of Guazacualco, sent messengers to me, by whom he transmitted jewels of gold, skins of tigers, feathers, and precious stones.

Here John paused, and turned over several pages.

"This seems to be all of importance relating to the mines; those we seek, I should judge, are in that province that was ruled over by the fierce cacique. He never allowed the Spaniards to return to the province, and these—probably the richest gold deposits in all Mexico—have ever since remained unknown to white men." He was addressing himself as much as his companions.

"And the question," said the Don, "is to find the exact locality in which dwelt that fierce cacique. Have you any clue?"

"I think," said John, refraining from any reference to Juanito's magic roll, "that we will first seek to reach the province of Tamazulapa, through which one of the golden-sanded streams flowed,

and then try to work out the problem from the traditions of the Indians there, he added at length."

Don Augustino smiled incredulously.



"THIS SEEMS TO BE ALL OF IMPORTANCE," SAID JOHN.

"We can do it," hotly asserted Juanito, "now that señorito has the story of the Indians and that of the great captain, and finds they fit together. But, Little Master, did you note what Captain Cortez says of the river we have sailed up,

and the Province of Guazacualco? The governor of the province, as he calls him — he was a *king* — was the father of Malinche, and he was a friend of the fierce cacique. Little Master can see the true traditions are with the people of that province, can he not?"

"Yes," interrupted the Don, "and part of his province is now covered by the *hacienda* of Tuxtlas, and I have heard that some of the *peones* there claim to be the descendants of that 'King' of Guazacualco, and descendants too of his daughter, Malinche." He spoke in a sneering tone, as though he had little belief in, and less sympathy for, any poor Indian *peon*.

Juanito's eyes flashed ominously, but he restrained his passion. He had refrained from any allusion to his own relationship with the Indian princess, and he now shot John a warning look, fearing, perhaps, he might betray the secret of his parentage.

"Well, my friends," said the *haciendado*, "you are welcome to the book; take it with you, and may it help you. Still don't pin too much your

faith on travellers' tales and don't parley with the Indians. You insist upon going to-morrow? Yes? Good-night, then; I will have you called early. Good-night!"

The next morning saw them off at an early hour. The noble Don bade them final adieu, the "*carga* mule" took her place at the head of the line where it moved sedately along ahead of the horses, without either bit or bridle, and so their journey into the hills had begun. The little mule always leading the van, they filed away across the plain, finally losing sight of the *hacienda*, and entering the forests of the foothills.

A different scenery awaited them here, entirely tropical in character, where the rank vegetation of the lowlands resounded with the cries of parrots and trogons. Two or three leagues' ride through this luxuriant vegetation brought them to the banks of a dark and rapid-flowing river. This they had to ford. The current was swift, but their horses were good swimmers, and boldly plunged in, led by the *carga* mule, who seemed to spurn the water with her little hoofs. "Look at

Lorita," said the *arriero*, admiringly, "she can do everything but talk; she is as bright as a parrot, and that is why I called her *Lorita*."

A dug-out floated here, on the other bank, and a long, peaked-roofed hut of grass stood at the edge of the forest. Dripping from their swim, the young horsemen presented themselves at the doorway and said *buenas dias* to its inmates; but as the men, half a dozen savage-looking Mestizos, were in a high state of intoxication, they did not stop. They rode on farther, and then halted at a curve of the stream and tied their horses. Taking a small shallow pan from the saddle-bag, John waded into the stream and dipped up some sand. Juanito watched approvingly: "You are right, *señorito*, this *rio* flows direct from the golden country; if we find gold in these sands, then we know we must find gold at its head."

John came up on the bank and whirled the pan around swiftly, pouring out the larger particles of gravel, little by little, and dipping up fresh quantities of water, until only the finest of the sand remained in the dish. The boys both bent over

it anxiously; then carefully John whirled it again with a peculiar motion, again throwing out the water and lightest sand, till but a minute portion was left in the pan. It needed only a glance this time to detect numerous glittering particles, yellow and sparkling! John's face was radiant. Juanito, forgetting his usual caution, exclaimed outright:

“*Es oro!* — It is the yellow gold!”

“It's onward now,” said John, and with light hearts they mounted their horses and rode away.

By and by they crossed the margin of the low country, the *tierra caliente*, and now they entered a cooler region, and higher, the *tierra templada*, or temperate zone. Here vegetation differed again, and they rode through beautiful groves of oak, always climbing higher and higher.

So the days of their journey sped, a tropic panorama of forest and jungle and cliff, broken by sudden showers, and varied by glimpses of uninhabited villages, and by nights in decaying and deserted cabins. And now they had come to a region where John was constantly upon the alert, dismounting and making long forays into vales

and up heights, often consulting the old volume of Cortez's *Letters* which they had found at the *hacienda*. From its pages he knew that if they were upon the right trail, there should be somewhere in this vicinity the traces of a ruined fort ; and at last one day they did find a small section of broken wall — that and nothing more. But from that moment John felt confident. "Without doubt," he declared to Juanito, "we are on the border-land of the fierce Chinantecos, those strange savages who met the messengers of Montezuma with gigantic spears and so barred the entrance to their territory, though they allowed the Spaniards to go through, and showed them such treasures of gold as have never been discovered since."

"And the golden-sanded river," broke in Juanito, "has its rise in this very region. I have heard my mother say so, and I hope *señorito* is not going to abandon it entirely. Little Master knows there is gold in the river."

"Never fear, *chiquito*," said John playfully, "we can return ; but let us first find the greater treasure beyond."

That afternoon another black storm-cloud burst over them drenching them quickly, and making the clayey trail precarious footing. Just as the cloud discharged upon them its huge volume of water they were nearing the brink of a ravine which they must descend, and then climb the opposite bank before reaching the village beyond, which they could see — their destination for the night. The descent could only be made over some thirty steps hewn out of the solid rock of the precipice. *Lorita* (the *carga* mule) descended jauntily, until half-way down, when she suddenly halted, sniffed suspiciously at the step ahead of her, and tried to re-ascend. The rocky pathway was wide enough for but one beast, and they were descending single file. By the mule's action they were crowded back and the horses, frightened, began to prance about. "*Hola, mula!*" shouted the *arriero*, "*anda!* — go on!"

But "*mula*" refused to go, and pushed back against Juanito's mare, who raised herself on her hind feet and came down against the poor creature with such force as to topple her over the cliff!

A cry of horror rose — for the wall below appeared a sheer descent — hushed at once, as Juanito's horse backed her hind feet over the wall, fell, recovered herself, and hung, by her fore-feet only, clinging against the escarpment. Even the trained steed rode by John felt the horror of the occasion and seemed determined to follow after its companion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL THROUGH INDIAN LAND.

THE *arriero* was safe because he was in the rear; fortunately, too, he had a cool head. He at once uncoiled the *riata*—the lasso—carried over his shoulders, and threw it down to Juanito, who caught it. Passing the other end around the trunk of a tree growing on the bank above, the *arriero* then signalled the boy to cast himself loose from the saddle. This he did, firmly grasping the noose of the *riata*, and the agile *arriero* drew him easily over the brink and up back to the ledge.

Meanwhile, John's horse was uneasily pacing the narrow ridge, in imminent danger of shying over the precipice; but the *arriero* slipped by her, grasped her bridle, and conducted horse and rider down the path to a broader shelf. John

then slipped from the saddle and ran back to the aid of Juanito, who was holding the head of his mare, and encouraging her with soothing murmurs. The ever-present lasso hung from the horn of the saddle; reaching it, John uncoiled it and got it around the tree above. Joining together the two other *riatas*, these were swung in the form of an immense loop under the quarters of the horse, and one end also attached to the tree. Then, with John at the other, the *arriero* hauling at the line fastened to the saddle, and Juanito at the horse's head, the grand effort was made. The creature seemed to understand every word, every motion, and looked beseechingly into her owner's eyes, as though to ask him to hurry as her feet were slipping and her limbs trembling with the strain.

"Now, *Bonita*!" whispered Juanito in her ear.
"Up!"

"All together!" shouted John.

"*Anda*!" cried the *arriero*. The mare herself made a mighty effort, her hoof smiting against the cliff and striking fire from its flinty surface; the young men strained every nerve and muscle at

the ropes, and in another minute the little beauty stood upon the ledge, trembling, reeking with perspiration, yet safe.

Juanito loosened the saddle-girths and led her down to the bed of the ravine, where the white mare received her with a grateful neigh of recognition. Leaving him to care for the horses, John and the *mulero* threaded their way back down to the point where the mule had fallen, expecting to discover its mangled remains. They reached the place where she must have struck, in her descent, some ten feet below the trail, but there was no sign of her there — only a little hair upon the edge of a boulder and a streak of blood here and there. They looked at each other in amazement. The *mulero* raised his tattered hat and scratched his head. "Señor," he said, in awe-stricken tones, "do you think anything has flown away with *mulita*?" He gazed up in the air, as though expecting to find her sailing towards the sky; but John looked farther down the slope, and there saw the recreant *mulita* placidly nibbling the leaves of the bushes, which had partially concealed her.

The *arriero* was almost crazy with delight, darting at the little beast and hugging her round the neck, while she poured into his ears a most dolorous bray.

John was surprised to discover the *carga* undisturbed by the fall, though the mule must have landed upon it in her fall from the cliff; but the *arriero* resented any imputation that anything terrestrial could have disturbed a *carga* of his packing, anyway. Nothing but omnipotent force, he declared, could detach that bale of luggage from the mule, without first cutting the girths. With great difficulty they extricated the mule from her perilous position, and after a long delay joined Juanito at the brookbed.

Without further adventure, they reached the village ahead of them, just before dark, and arrived before the door of the *casa municipal*, or town-house, in a dripping condition. This was the first inhabited Indian village they had entered. They found but one white man in it — the shrewdest *gente de razon* they had yet met. This Mexican term means a “man of reason,” of intelligence, and

is applied by the Indians exclusively to white men, and is a relic of the days of Spanish dominion. So, when John rode up to the door of the *casa* and inquired if there were any *gente de razon* in the place, he was instantly understood by the assembled Indians as asking for a white man, and several of them instantly replied, "*Si, señor, uno solo* — Yes, sir, one only."

"Then I would see him," he said, thanking them for the information, and they hastened in to acquaint their "man of reason" of the arrival of strangers. It seemed to be a noteworthy event, this visit of a white man to their village, and many scores of Indians came crowding around. They appeared to be moved by curiosity only, and were polite and attentive to his requests and wants.

When the only "reasonable man" of the region appeared, he proved to be a very hospitable one and at once invited them to dismount, directing the *mulero* to take off the saddles and packs, and pile them up on his veranda, and asked them into the house. When he heard of the trail they had come over, and the country they had ridden through,

he declared his wonder and admiration in hearty terms. He proved indeed to be the jolliest of hosts, a man given to politics, holding an office under the Mexican government — that of *jefe politico* — or political chief, of the district. It somehow transpired what the young men's mission was, and the worthy man appeared greatly concerned for their safety, repeatedly warning them against going farther into the country of the Tamazulapaus — the Indians who guarded the secret of the ancient mines.

He readily admitted that the mines existed and were in that region, for he had heard so all his life long; but he added that from generation to generation the inhabitants of that tract had sworn to defend the secret with their lives; they had a hundred rifles with which a band of trained men weekly drilled. "They have sworn eternal enmity to all miners," said he, "because they have heard what ruin and destruction miners have brought upon other regions. And their traditions tell them that all the troubles of their race came from disclosing to strangers the secrets of their wealth."

Mentally acquiescing in the wisdom of the Indians, in thus keeping foreigners out of their gold-fields, John yet laughingly declared that he should not think of abandoning the search until the armed men resisted his entrance into the territory.

The travellers again took to the saddle, next morning, leaving their host uttering many a dismal prediction. Their trail now led over hills and mountains. They were entering into the country of the *Serranos* — the mountaineers — descendants of a long line of unconquered ancestors, a people who long resisted the encroachments of Montezuma and his Aztecs, and had beaten back the soldiers of Cortez himself. All these hills were inhabited; the crests and ridges were covered with majestic oak-trees and their sides with rich gardens.

They zigzagged up and down narrow trails for days, crossing many streams, and riding through several villages buried in seas of verdure, in the last of which, a little town called Comaltepec, they met with a great surprise — a great surprise,

produced by a very little man. As they were riding through the pleasant lanes between gardens walled in with rocks and enclosed by hedges of the *organo*, or organ cactus, a grotesque figure rose up out of the road.

"*Hola!*" whispered Juanito to John, "there's the owner of Ocote *rancho*, the old rascal in whose hut we slept last night."

"So it is!" said John, "but how did he get out here, three or four leagues from his *rancho*, ahead of us, when we started at daylight?"

"Oh, any Mexican knows side-trails and short cuts; trust him for that, in his own country."

The owner of Ocote *rancho* was a most comically-ferocious old man, not over five feet high, and about sixty years old. He was so short and "stubby" that he might have been taken for a boy, were it not for his iron-gray hair (which was pulled over his eyes) and his bristly beard. The hair hid almost the whole of his face, and through it twinkled a pair of beady black eyes. On his head he wore a broad sombrero, nearly three feet wide; and the rest of his garb consisted of a

cotton shirt, a pair of wide cotton trousers, and rude leather sandals kept in place by thongs passing between his toes and fastened around his bare ankles. A very broad leather belt girt his waist, and in this were stuck a huge knife and an immense revolver; both weapons so large that they arrested the attention at once, and gave him the appearance of a bandit.

He had planted himself directly in the path. There was nothing to do but halt. He grinned with malicious glee, and held out his hand, which the travellers shook, perforce, in turn. He beckoned them to follow, and led the way to a little *adobe* house on a hillside, in which, to their astonishment, they beheld a forge and implements for smelting metals. From some mysterious hiding-place he brought out some nuggets of gold and some specimens of silver in solid bars. These he placed in John's hands, and then stood peering through his bushy hair into the young man's face as he examined them.

John was inwardly agitated, over this virgin gold, probably from the hill-mines of his search,

but he studied a calm demeanor, weighted the gold carelessly, and as carelessly inquired where it came from.

The old *ranchero* had not yet spoken, but he now opened his mouth, pointed to the gold, wagged his head knowingly, and said one word: "*Oro!*"

"Yes, I see it is gold. But where did you get it?"

The little bandit pointed to the silver and exclaimed: "*Plata!*"

John handed the specimens back, spoke to Juanito, and moved towards the door. But the *ranchero* darted forward and planted himself in their way.

"*Para!*—Hold! Has *el caballero* ever heard of the mountain-mines of Montezuma—the great king? Let *el caballero* bethink himself."

John assented by a nod, outwardly undisturbed. The bandit seemed to bore into him with his little gimlet eyes, for an instant. Then he whispered huskily: "This gold came from that mine. *Si! es el oro sacro*—the sacred gold!"

The effect upon *el caballero* was not, evidently, what he had hoped. He went on: "*El caballero*

has heard of that mine? He is even now in search of it? Yes? But he knows not where it is. I know. I can conduct *el señor*."

John consulted with Juanito as to what they had better do; treat with the man, or leave him.

"He is a rascal," said Juanito; "but he *may* have knowledge *señorito* could use for our good. Let him go with us, and I will watch the wizard for Little Master."

When the *ranchero* had secured their attention, he became voluble and told them why he had followed after them, and why he had intercepted them.

"After the *señores* had left my *rancho*, I asked myself why strangers — and white men — should visit this country; for not in years have I seen one here before. And in a dream of the morning it came to me that the *caballeros* were searching for the Aztec mines; and I rose at once and saddled my *burro* and reached my town-house ahead of the gentlemen. And here I am, sent, as they can see, by *Dios* through the medium of a dream, to guide them on their journey."



"ORO!" SAID THE OLD RANCHERO.

"That being the case," remarked John, "the sooner we go the better."

In a short time the Mexican had drawn out and saddled his donkey, strapped a pair of enormous spurs to his bare heels, and was leading the way. He was more comical than before, mounted on his *burro*, for the little beast scarcely lifted the Don's feet clear of the ground, and in order to make her move faster than the horses he kept his bare legs, with their huge spurs, in constant motion against her sides, his arms tossing in corresponding motion. He now and then checked their flapping to communicate some item of information and to strengthen the impression that he had been supernaturally sent to guide them to the lost mines. He finally confided to them that in addition to his dream, the oracle, the old Indian squaw at Iztlan, had told him only two days before that two noble young men were on the way to bring him a fortune. And the fortune-teller of Iztlan never made a mistake! "Señor," he eagerly cried, stopping his donkey so suddenly that John's horse nearly walked over him, "señor, I am the only one in

this region, with another, who knows of the existence of these mines! For forty years, I have carried the secret; I could not trust my countrymen; but *el Americano* I know I can trust; he shall be told everything. Even the governor came here, with a company of soldiers, seeking the mine; but he went away with nothing. The friend who gave me the secret brought from the mine a burro-load of gold; yes, much as his donkey could bear; though he was killed by the mountain Indians who followed and sought him out. I alone am left. I alone have the golden secret."

Then he rode on again, still flapping his arms like a windmill and his heels in constant motion.

Towards evening time they reached the verge of the plateau on which they had been riding. Here they saw a terrible trail leading down the steep sides of red sandstone cliffs, to a green and quiet valley, through which a yellow river roared. "*Alla!*—there!" said the Don, halting at the brink, "is the entrance to the land of the treasure; behold the river with the yellow sands!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDIAN TOWN IN TIERRA CALIENTE.

IT was, indeed, a *terrible* trail that led down into the valley, twisting about and doubling upon itself along the sides of cliffs and over rocks and fallen trees. But it gave them access into the heart of *tierra caliente*, into the very centre of sun-land, the vast and perpendicular cliffs of sandstone walling it in.

Once down, and fording the tumultuous river, Don Tomaso, the *ranchero*, led them to a broad field, in which some Indians were at work, ploughing the soil with a crooked stick. They all wore a simple costume of cotton *camisa* and *pantalones*, and a hat; but one of their number Don Tomaso addressed as *el presidente*, and to him explained that the strangers had come to pay him a visit of respect, having heard of his bounty and the great

attractions of his town when in the City of Mexico.

Courteously acknowledging this honor, the president at once abandoned the plough to the patient oxen, and with simple dignity led the way to the village, which slumbered in a grove of tropical trees. Not a house was visible until they had entered the grove; then the thatched huts appeared, made of poles plastered with mud; lowly dwellings, but neat and clean. Orange-trees, yellow with fruit, great walnut-trees, and others purple with plums, completely sheltered this little village from observation.

They were taken direct to the *casa real*, the *cabildo*, the house provided by the people for the entertainment of travellers. The *alcalde*, the chief of the village, was summoned to usher them into it with becoming ceremony. The *alcalde* came with silver-tipped staff carried before him, saluted the strangers in the name of his townfolk, produced an immense key, opened the door, and bade them welcome to the hospitalities of Tamazulapa. The *casa real* did not prove an attractive house;

its walls were damp and mouldy, and its thatch swarming with centipedes, tarantulas and lizards, so long had it been since strangers had occupied it before. But it was the house of state and it had two windows, which was more than any of the huts could boast.

Women came, and brushed and dusted the furniture (consisting of a table and two benches) and swept the clay floor until it was clean. Then the principal men arrived, with presents of fruit, fowls and eggs. The children (lovely girls and boys of dusky hue) peered slyly around the trunks of the trees, or corners of the houses. The saddles and the packs were piled up in a corner, their animals led away to pasture, and then the young men were left in entire possession of the *cabildo*, as completely as though it had been theirs from the beginning of time. They unstrapped their revolvers and hung them above their carbines in the corner.

"It doesn't appear as though these men were going to attack us," remarked John, as he removed his heavy spurs and flung himself into the hammock their *arriero* had stretched beneath the trees.

"No," answered Juanito; "these are honest men."

"Have a care, *señores*, I say," said Don Tomaso; "have a care for your rifles and revolvers; they have your horses; we cannot get away; there is but the one trail out of the valley. What will you do if they come upon you with their trained soldiers? While they believe you friends of mine, all is well. But let your errand be known and" — he drew his hand rapidly across his throat, and threw up his arms, like a man struck by a bullet. "You are safe because you are *my* friends, *señores*."

Juanito shrugged his shoulders quietly; but Don Tomaso saw the motion, sprang to his feet, and plunged forward, snapping his fingers in the boy's face. "*Perillo!*" he hissed. "Dog of an Indian! What know you of these people?"

Juanito sprang at him with the swiftness of a bow suddenly unbent, and had him at once by the throat and forced down upon his knees, before John could interpose. Don Tomaso was fumbling at his belt for his knife. John reached them with a bound, laid one hand on Don Tomaso's right arm,

and the other on Juanito's choking hand. "What folly, *amigo!*" he said in the ear of the boy who



JUANITO HAD HIM DOWN ON HIS KNEES.

at once loosed his hold, excited as he was. The separated combatants glared vindictively at each other, without a word; then each returned to his

seat; but John was troubled, for he knew that a desperate conflict between them was inevitable. "I should have shaken off the old Mexican!" he impatiently reflected. "It was a false move, and I fear a fatal one."

At dusk, when they could retreat to a quiet spot, unobserved, the young men talked it over. John spared his reproaches, knowing it would have been as impossible to stay a cyclone as the wrath of a Mexican who had received such an insult. The question was how to prevent another collision. Juanito, after a long silence, promised to avoid conversation with their badly-chosen guide. "I am sorry," he added, "if Juanito has made trouble for the Little Master. But *señorito* must understand that Tomaso is determined to kill Juanito and it matters not what means he takes. Juanito will avoid him all he can; but if a fight comes—then the *señorito* must chose whether Tomaso must die or Juanito." He looked into John's eyes mournfully, almost reproachfully, then continued: "Juanito is not afraid to die; but what will then become of *señorito*?"

"Nonsense, my boy," cried John, "neither of you must die. Avoid him ; help me plan to dismiss him."

Contrary to John's fears, the two Mexicans next morning seemed to have utterly forgotten their quarrel, and he gave himself up to the pleasure of studying this new and peaceful tribe of Indians for a few days. It seemed to him that they did little else than dance and sing, in pleasant weather, and cultivate their gardens when the rain came down. So far as their religion went, they might have been classed as pagans, for they clung far more closely to the ancient rites of the sun-worship than to the forms taught them by the Romish priests of later times. They had the remains of a church, it is true, and said certain prayers, and observed many feast-days. They were irreproachable in their conduct to one another, loving their neighbors as themselves. They were at first shy of their stranger-guests, especially were the children shy ; their modesty was a charm that gave grace to all their actions. In song and dance they were very graceful and

pleasing, having sweet voices and lithe limbs well trained.

On the first Sunday of their stay occurred the grand sun-dance. The oldest men formed themselves in procession, with their faces painted in various colors and startling figures, and carrying in their hands fans of turkey-feathers, in the brightest dyes. Some of them wore masks, and were most hideous to look upon, and all had on the curious garments worn by their ancestors in most ancient times. A tall flag-staff was borne in front from which fluttered a banner, brightly painted with the great smiling face of the sun.

After marching through all the village, receiving offerings of drinks and fruits from every house, they assembled in the *plazita* — the little square in front of the *cabildo* — and formed around their banner. Their chief men then harangued them upon the religion of their forefathers, telling them that the first deity was a being unseen, whom they could not approach ; but who took pity on his poor children of earth and sent them the sun, as his visible presence, ever shining in the sky by day, and rest-

ing only at night. Hence, though the priests had since told them of a different god, of an ever-living presence, who had once manifested himself in human shape, yet they should offer their tribute yearly to the first conception of their forefathers, and should teach to their children the true godship of the sun, a deity appointed to their race by the First and Invisible God.

This chieftain was distinguished by a high crown of turkey-feathers, which made his dusky features appear even darker. After he had chanted a long song in their native tongue, his followers replied reverently, and then the music struck up, in weird strains, and they danced furiously, shaking their fans and their rattles of tortoise-shell to and fro, but all moving, swift or slow, in perfect tune.

Nearly an hour was devoted to dance and song. Then, at a signal, they suddenly stopped, gathered about the banner, and gazed upon the sun-image with looks of adoration. A dance of sorrow or supplication followed ; then the dance of joy, after which the flag was furled, and the day was spent in visits and feasts.

During the week following, Tomaso led them out on three fruitless searches into the hills. In John's opinion he seemed to be feeling his way, rather than trying to show them paths and localities of which he had certain knowledge, and one evening as they sat together in the hut, reading by candle-light, he intimated this to Juanito. The Indian lad was jubilant : " Then señorito no longer has *any* faith in *el ladronito* the little robber, eh ? Well, has he lost faith in Juanito ? No ? If that is so, to-morrow let Juanito again lead the search."

Don Tomaso's shock of hair appeared in the doorway, at this moment, and through it glittered his little black eyes ; he had evidently overheard a portion, at least, of the conversation. " Ah, it is not true, then, is it," sneered he, " that gold was found in the river-sands ? And the great *capitan* did not learn from Montezuma of rich mines near Tamazulapa ? And I am a robber ? But gold *is* here, nevertheless—in the hills, in a pit, reached only through long galleries. *Es verdad* ; but I — and I alone — know of the entrance to those

galleries. I will show you Don Juan ; you will see, Don Juan."

The candle was spluttering in its socket, but dimly lighting the room ; all the Indians had retired to their houses, long since ; so they sought their hammocks. But both John and Juanito in the darkness buckled about them their belts, containing their revolvers and knives, outside their serapes. They exchanged no words, but each of the young men felt a new dread of their guide. However, from Don Tomaso's hammock soon came the sound of regular snoring, and they at last dropped asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

A TIGER CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

JOHN'S rest was broken, hours later, by a dull thud, as of some one thrown violently to the floor. This sound was followed by a tumult of scuffling, hard breathing, and half-suppressed cries of pain. He reached over to Juanito's hammock—it was empty! With swift consciousness that help was needed he sprang up and flashed his light. He saw two forms writhing on the floor.

It was an inspiration truly, that had suggested to him the lighting of their dark lantern, to place out of sight in a corner; he had done this while Tomaso was in the corral, before the hammocks were swung.

Instantly, now, as he leaped to the floor, he illuminated the space in front of him brightly, and he was relieved to find Tomaso was underneath;

one arm only free. Juanito was crouched upon his breast, like a young tiger-cat, one knee against his left arm, and striving to secure his right hand, and its murderous *cuchillo*—the broad-bladed knife usually worn in the belt. The sudden light enabled him to fasten upon it, and then the little giant was pinned securely to the floor. He looked like a vicious, human embodiment of a tarantula—a grizzly, hairy spider—as he lay there with limbs outstretched, and glowering upon his captor through his shock of hair. His revolver was still sticking from his belt, and John drew it out. “Now what shall we do with him?” said he to Juanito. It was a puzzling situation, surely. They knew not what disposition to make of him. “The knives, carbines, revolvers—secure them, Little Master,” said Juanito, still holding Tomaso fast.

This done, the agile lad leaped up, clear of the bandit, at a bound, and leaving him free. Tomaso was on his feet in an instant. He darted swiftly at the table. But John, seizing his shoulder, pulled him back and spun him into his own corner, where he crouched like an ocelot—an Aztec tiger—his

small, black, wicked eyes following every motion.

The young men had no speech in common save Spanish. This tongue Tomaso also understood, and they could not consult. But on one thing they were settled without speech — their enemy must be watched; and through the slow-moving hours of the night, they sat up and kept him in the light of the lantern, weapons in reach. Tomaso never stirred from his crouching position in the corner; not even when daylight began to struggle through the chinks in the walls, and Juanito, opening the door, went in search of the *alcalde*. He was still in his corner, like a sulky spider, when Juanito returned, with the *alcalde*, *presidente*, and other chief men of the village. But as they entered, Tomaso leaped for the door. He was forced back by two strong Indians, and they, under the directions of the *alcalde*, dragged him off to the *calaboza*.

Then, gathering in conclave under the spreading branches of a tamarind-tree, with sentinels out to keep off intruders, the village officials invited the strangers to tell their story.

"It is a serious thing," began the alcalde, with dignity and simplicity, "a serious thing to place one in the *calaboza* who has claimed our hospitality. Still we have protected you. Now we must know what this man has done."

"Certainly, señor," answered John. "It is your right. The man simply sought our lives." But Juanito narrated the events of the night. He himself came of Indian stock, and he was speaking to Indians; accordingly he wasted no words. His account was succinct: "*Señoras*, we retired late. My friend slept. I, suspicious of the heavily-breathing Tomaso, remained awake. An hour passed. Two hours. My eyes were open. The heavy breathing ceased. I heard other sounds. Tomaso left his hammock. He crept softly towards us. He came under my hammock. I expected to feel his knife searching for me. But he crept on. Beneath *señorito's* hammock he halted. I sprang. The rest you know."

There was a general stir of assent. "Without a doubt, he intended to kill the white stranger — *el blanco*; but why?" They waited for the reason.

Juanito hesitated. He would have consulted with John, since the assigning of the reason involved the disclosure of their secret. He looked inquiringly at the Little Master. He, divining his thoughts, nodded approval.

Juanito went on: "*Señores*, the reason is this: *Señorito*, my friend and master, has learned, from a wonderful book written by the great *Capitan*, Don Fernando Cortés, that there exists in these mountains, golden treasure"—

He stopped, for the usually stolid Indians showed intense excitement. They rose. Whispering together, they glanced at the young stranger with anything but good-will expressed in their looks.

"Go on," said the *alcalde* at last.

"That is all," proceeded Juanito. "Our presence here so near the secret mines surely explains our purpose."

"But Tomaso — why should he take your lives?"

"Tomaso met us, at Comaltepec, showed us gold; said he could guide us to the ancient mine, and joined us. I doubt now his knowledge. But he listened last night to the reading from *El Capi-*

tan's account. Now he knows all that we know. That being so — ”

He halted again. A flash of intuition told John the conclusion of that unfinished sentence. “That being so,” John himself hurriedly said, “he had all our secret. He needed us no longer. Why should he share the gold with us? He could penetrate more safely and surely without us than with us. So he would kill us.”

At this point some unexpected testimony was offered, throwing a new light upon Tomaso's actions. An old Indian rose — one of the influential personages of the town. “The gold,” said he, “which this Tomaso had — that which he showed the strangers — know ye whence it came? *It was mine!* Once, many years ago, I carried gold to him; he was a silversmith, at Imulco. He kept my gold. He tried to force me to tell whence I got it. More than this — he stole the pieces I placed before the Blessed Virgin, which I took to her, with prayers that she would bless my venture. He stole them, and I had not heart to work, because the Holy Virgin had been defrauded of her por-

tion. But I refused to show him the mine. He knows naught of the mine. Forty years, it was, ago. I have done." He sat down and drew his serape about him.

Yet what should these peaceful men do with Tomaso? They were in as great perplexity as were the young strangers a few hours before. Keep him in the calaboose a period and then send him out of the valley, with a warning never to return, as he valued his life. That was the final decision.

But the more important question concerned the young strangers. It was demanded of John and Juanito that they should not depart by stealth. Then the council adjourned for breakfast, for it was late; smokes were curling all around them, and savory odors greeted the young men as, silent, they returned to the *cabildo*.

At noon they were summoned. The discussion among the Tamazulapaus was dignified, but grave and earnest. The solemn tone of it convinced John that these Indians were indeed the custodians of the historic mines. Should they allow

these strangers to go farther, the presidente asked.

"They are not like the Spaniards, truly," mildly urged the alcalde; "yet," added he, in a deepening tone, "they are white men. Other white men will certainly follow after these, should they reach the King's Treasure. That smoke, ascending into the upper air, tells to dwellers upon the hills that we have here a fire; no less certainly will the visits of white men here proclaim to all the world that they have found gold! Who does not remember the sufferings of the people when the Spaniards came through the land in search of money? What should *we* gain? Now, we have enough for our wants; the ground gives us all we need, and all are happy. Of what use is gold to us? We neither buy nor sell. Of what good will be the coming of many men, to dig pits in our farms and spoil the water of our streams?"

The presidente, in a long, serious speech, agreed with the alcalde that it would be wisdom to keep the secret of the mine buried as deep as its deepest pit was dug. "Yet," he added, looking com-

passionately upon his protégés, "these young men have come many, many miles to learn of this treasure; one of them has sailed the wide ocean (which none of us have ever seen); they have come in *canoas* up the dark river, Coatzacoalcos; have crossed the savannas, and forced their horses over the rough trails of the Sierras. Brave men are they. Others have come here, truly; but how? The *gobernador* came, with files of soldiers, and demanded of us our gold; but we fled to the hills and he marched home at last with nothing as his reward. Chatto — the flat-nose — came also; his fate ye all know! Like him perish all robbers! But these come in peace. My eyes have seen none like these before. *Their* eyes are clear. Their voices are kind. Would that the young men of our people were as they."

There was a buzz of approbation; and the *alcalde*, seeing that the majority present appeared likely to favor the strangers, shrewdly moved to again adjourn. This they were about to do when Juanito rose and asked their attention for a moment, and the *alcalde* granted him a hearing.

"Friends and brothers," began the boy in a tongue quite unknown to John. But a visible thrill of emotion ran through the assemblage. He was speaking in Zapotec, their own language. This was their first intimation of his knowledge of it. Clearly he had understood every word of their discussion. Every face was turned to him. Alarm, curiosity, interest, together with a strange look of kinship, moulded the expression of all.

"It is no slight favor we would ask of you," continued Juanito, "yet you will grant it; if it were ten times as great, ye would grant it! We seek the old mines, but not alone for our own advantage. We are willing to yield you a revenue from our labors. We wish to be of benefit to you. But you will grant what we ask, because I ask it—and for no other reason."

Then Juanito drew his right hand from its hiding-place in his breast, and spread it out, palm towards them.

Instantly, to John's surprise, although he was expecting some surprising development to be brought about by Juanito, from his air and im-

pressive tone, every member of the group bowed his head and touched his forehead ; a murmur ran around : " Coatelicamar ! Coatelicamar ! "

" Need I tell you, friends," continued the young Indian, still in Zapotec, " that I am descended from Malinche ; that from her, through long lines of ancestors, I received into my keeping this totem I now display before you ? "

" We know now that you are one of us," returned the alcalde, " even though your tribe be now far separated from us.

" But it is a great thing you ask of us ; it is a thing no man yet has wrested from us. Through long years of poverty, though tempted by the offers of riches, we have kept the secret of the mines. Tribute in the name of Malinche has never been exacted. If you command, in the name of the great princess, Malinche, we must comply ; but withdraw the totem and reflect upon the consequences to our tribe. Here, before you, are old men and young ; yonder are our wives and children ; in peace and happiness we dwell here ; in peace and happiness we may continue to dwell, un-



JUANITO SHOWS THE TOTEM OF THE LORD OF THE HILLS.



less the gold-seeking miners come. Then we shall pass from our homes, wanderers in the wild lands, no more to be gathered together."

"That, surely, we should not desire," returned Juanito; "you say truly, that I am one of you! I speak your language; the blood of the Zapoteca flows in my veins. Yet, while you are free my family is in peonage; yes, held as slaves — even my mother, my brother, and sister. To free them, to bring them back to join their kindred, I must have gold, much gold. This I need — enough to pay their ransom; the rest I care not for, I would stay and dwell with you. My friend too has great deeds to do with gold."

"How much require you for the ransom?" asked the presidente.

Juanito told the sum; it was great, because the inherited debt had accumulated through years and years.

"I doubt if there be so much in all the village," said the alcalde.

He whispered to the old men, and they silently separated, each going to his own division of the

village, and soon there was an outgoing of women, children, and older people. Each one brought something and deposited it upon a blanket, in the *plazita*. Upon their faces were glad smiles, for they had been told to bring all the money they possessed to redeem one of their own race from peonage ; and they rejoiced in the noble deed. The chief man counted the little heaps upon the blanket. " Is there no more ? " he said.

" No more ! It is all our houses held ! " The presidente sighed : " Alas ! there is not half enough ! Take back, O, my people, your treasures. The strangers must go to the mine. But let us wait through the night."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE MINE'S MOUTH.

IT was their first peaceful night in the Indian village, their first opportunity for unrestrained conversation.

With a sense of happy security, they sat by their lamp. "It is a question," John declared to Juanito "whether or not we ought to persist in our search, for if these people oppose it they certainly have the best of reasons. To go on is an awful responsibility. But what was it you said to them, Juanito; what did you show them, that changed at once their attitude of defiance to one of supplication?"

Juanito had not revealed to him what it was that he had held in his hand and displayed to the Indians.

"Does the *señorito* remember our conversation, the first day we spoke of the mines?"

"Yes ; you said you held a powerful means in reserve ; but of course I had no idea what it was."

"No. Juanito does not let all of himself be known at once."

"But what is it ?"

"Has the *señorito* ever heard of the tribute-book of Montezuma ?"

Señorito had heard of a tribute-book.

"He knows that in it are all the records of the many treasures sent to the great king ?"

John shook his head.

"*Piels de tigre* (tiger skins) *copalli* (copal), gold, as well as rich feathers and precious stones," went on Juanito. "The name of the people who sent them with each. And the totems of each Pueblo. The *señorito* knows," pursued the imperturbable Juanito, "that I am descended from Malinche, Princess of Coatzacoalcos. Malinche, when Don Fernando Cortés went to Spain, came back to her own country. She was rich in land ; but had gold paid as tribute to her by the Indians. Every month, she sent her servants into the hills, and they came back with it."

"And what has all this to do with us?" asked John as Juanito paused.

"Much! *Señorito*, those servants, to get that gold, had to take to these hill-people the totem of the lord of the hills, which he had given Malinche; Coatelicamar — lord of the hills."

"Still, I am in the dark."

"Malinche died; the totem fell to her daughter, whose descendant I am."

A light broke upon the American at these words: "And it is that totem which you have?"

"Juanito has that totem!"

He drew forth from under his *camisa*, where it had hung around his neck, that little bag which John had seen on the coast, and from it extracted a piece of wrinkled parchment. Smoothing it out, he displayed to John's wondering eyes the cherished totem — a prostrate serpent with two curious figures upon its back.

"There is no doubt," said John, after carefully studying it, "this is the totem of Coatelicamar."

"It fixes, too, beyond a doubt, the exact location of the mine," said Juanito. "And now the *señorito*

knows all Juanito knows about it. Will *señorito* give up the search now?"

"No. My curiosity is more excited than ever. We will discover the mines, even if we have to retrace our steps and follow up the course of the river with the golden sands. We can then accomplish our purpose without disturbing our friends here, who will certainly not lose anything by our discovery, if they never gain."

With this resolve, they lay down to sleep. A surprise awaited them in the morning. As they opened their door, the *alcalde* and two others stood before it. They saluted them with respect, but waited till they had performed their ablutions and had breakfasted, before they announced their errand: "*Señores*, we will show you the mine!"

John thanked them, and they told him that two young men would go with them, next morning, to conduct them straight to the ancient shafts. But they wished to stipulate that they should not reveal to other white men the location. This John refused to promise.

"Then," said the *alcalde*, "our young men shall

not guide you. You may go and seek for yourselves; for how know we that the totem of Malinche was not gained by force, even by fraud?"

John laid a restraining hand upon the arm of Malinche's descendant. "So be it," he said. "On you must rest the responsibility of disobedience to the old tribal mandate. We will go without your protection, for go we will."

The alcalde was visibly shaken. But he replied only: "Beware, however, of the people there; the descendants of the great chief. His people are cannibals."

As they rode out of the village, towards the river, nearly the entire populace gathered about. The alcalde and presidente wore a troubled, anxious expression, but they did not relent. Juanito rode by them with a haughty look. With one backward turn, he again displayed the mighty totem, and figuratively shook the dust of their village from his garments.

Their route lay about a day's journey across the table-land into a rougher region. Their horses, refreshed by their tarry in the Indian pas-

tures, were frisky and sympathetic ; while the mule, freed from her pack and bearing on her back only the *arriero* and a pair of saddle-bags, kicked up her heels and brayed her delight loudly and often. Everything seemed auspicious, except for the predictions of the *alcalde*. They were travelling lightly, but were heavily armed ; each one having a belt full of cartridges about his waist, a carbine and a revolver. Even the *arriero* carried a revolver, of which he was so proud that he had it slung from a broad strap over his shoulder, where everybody could see it, and where the sun could glint the bright nickel trimmings on the butt and barrel. In a fight, he would rely, of course, upon his trusty *riata*, for he could lasso a man, or a wild animal, going at full gallop, and drag his victim to the ground without checking speed ; but a *riata* was not half so imposing as the revolver, and did not bestow such an air of distinction.

The trail grew rapidly worse, becoming, finally, only a narrow foot-path, which had hardly ever been trodden by any save the barefooted Indians and

their dogs; but their gallant horses were sure of foot, and with their noses to the ground safely bore them through every perilous passage.

Emerging upon a narrow reach of plateau, John (who was ahead) was about to avail himself of the opportunity for a gallop, when the *mulero* cried out. He reined in the impatient mare, who danced about in this direction and that, fretting, and wondering what the delay could mean. The *mulero* pointed out to him a long-tailed bird, with long and slender legs, and a sharp beak, which looked like a very large cuckoo, and which was industriously collecting something from amongst the cactus plants.

"I see it," said John, impatiently — "a *chachalaha*; why should you detain me to look at him?"

The *arriero* pointed beyond the bird, and there, coiled in the trail, was a large rattlesnake. It was apparently asleep; John pulled out his revolver, but the *arriero* held his arm. "Wait," he whispered, "wait and see the serpent die; *la chachalaha* will attend to him." They retired a pace, swung themselves off their saddles, and waited. Mean-

while, the curious bird had kept on with its employment, collecting the spiny leaves of the prickly-pear, which it carried toward the sleeping serpent and laid in a row around it. Its intention was apparent; it was building a barbed fence around the snake !

Almost breathlessly, they watched the process. It seemed almost human, in its gratified air of responsibility, as it quietly walked to and fro, nipping off a leaf and setting it in position, jerking its long tail here and there, and bobbing its head about with a sidelong glance at its audience.

Finally, the prickly fence was built; the bird walked around it noiselessly, stopping every gap, then hopped over to peck the snake on the tail with its sharp beak, quickly skipping back again and retiring to a safe distance to watch the effect. Thus rudely disturbed, the rattlesnake seemed at first disposed to coil up more tightly for a spring; but it changed its mind and started to crawl away. Then it saw the spiny hedge. It moved in another direction, only to encounter the same prickly wall. It seemed furious with rage, apparently realizing ~

its position ; but made a dash at the hedge, which met it with a thousand barbed darts ; these not only entered beneath its scales, but penetrated its mouth, when it bit at them in its fury. Hopelessly involved in the trap, the serpent turned upon itself and dealt a deadly wound with its own venomous fangs ; which event the *chachalaha* had seemed to expect, for the bird walked off with an air of satisfaction.

The *arriero* wagged his head. “ *Es demonio*,” he said ; “ that is the bird of the evil one.”

They went on, halting at noon by an *arroya*, near which was an Indian hut, where a woman with naked arms was grinding corn on the *metatl*, for the corn-cakes, or *tortillas*, for her family.

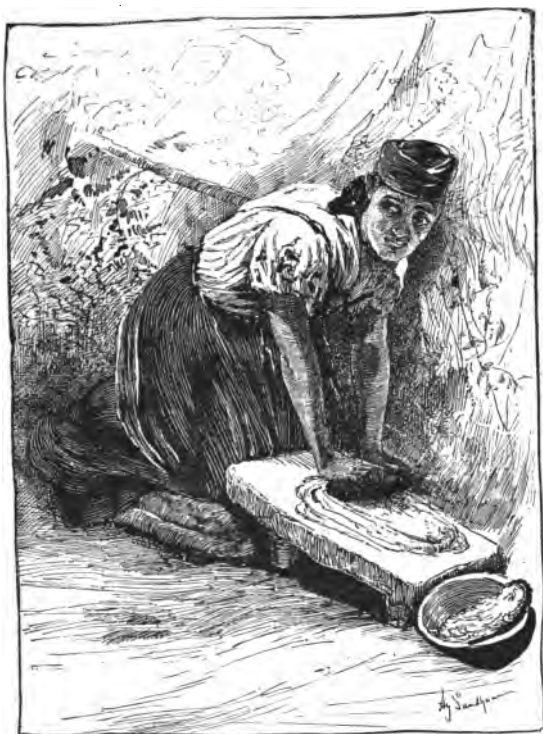
She was surprised at sight of strangers, but quietly offered them *tortillas*, and signed them to enter and be seated. She spoke a different tongue from their friends of the valley, and Juanito said she was one of the *Mixes*—the cannibal people, against whom the *alcalde* had warned them.

She was the only Indian they saw that day, until mid-afternoon, when two runners, stalwart young

men, came upon them suddenly out of a ravine, and stood before them in the trail. They held out a piece of paper, which explained that their friend, the alcalde, had relented, and had sent them as guides. "The totem has done its work," said Juanito grimly. "It has made itself obeyed."

The guides took their places, in advance of the horses. They had been able to overtake the horsemen by threading the foot trails through the ravines, which were shorter than the bridle-paths. They led on into a cañon, where mighty walls rose up on either side, and the path was precariously narrow and steep. The sun was rapidly descending behind the jagged crest of the cordillera, throwing a flood of golden light against the eastern wall of the cañon and glancing athwart the gray plains above. The quail and the *chachalahas* were calling, each to its kind, and seeking their night shelters.

The gloom of the great ravine deepened every minute, and still their guides beckoned them on. As they reached a curve of the ravine where it was wide enough for their horses to walk abreast, Juanito called a halt,



THE TORTILLA-MAKER.



"Let us stop," he said, "here is as good a place to camp as we shall find. I like my back to this great wall."

The cliff shelved back a rod or two, leaving a broad platform, over which it impended, completely sheltering them from above.

"A good place," declared Juanito, "which we can easily defend, should the cannibals conclude to attack us. Now let us off with the saddles, and barricade the approach from the path above."

"But wait, Juanito. Do you see our guides? They have lighted torches; they are at the mouth of a cave. Can *that* be the way into the mine?"

The Indian lad went on a step: "*Si*, they are beckoning to us. I will go to them; let the Little Master wait here, and have his hand on his rifle."

Juanito leaped across the ravine, which carried a rumbling stream away and away into unknown depths. He climbed on over a mass of broken rock until he reached the hole in the cliff where the Indians had halted. By the light of the torches, he closely scanned the face of the rock. Without a word to the guides he returned to John.

“No, *señorito*,” he said, “that is not the main entrance to the mine; possibly it is a side gallery. The vast heap of broken ore shows that it has been brought here. ‘How do I know it is not?’ Let *el señorito* remember again the totem. Yes! It was a red serpent. The tradition of my family says that the red serpent is painted at the mine’s mouth — on the rock. This rock bears no serpent. But it is near, *amigo mio*; it cannot be far; every trace is here of ancient mines. Put by the rifle, and let us prepare a camp. But look! back on the trail. Who is creeping down the rock? *Dios mio!* Get behind me, *señorito!*”

CHAPTER XI.

THE SACK OF GOLD.

JOHN sprang to his feet. He looked in the direction whence they had just come. But he saw nothing ; neither evidently did Juanito after that first startling apparition. Gloom and darkness settled down upon the place ; not even a shadow crossed the trail.

The boy rubbed his eyes, and looked inquiringly at the Little Master, with all the superstition of his race in his stare. " Surely, *señorito*, I saw him — the shade of our enemy, coming down the path."

John shook his head with a laugh : " It must have been your imagination, Juanito ; you saw that which you most feared to see ! "

Juanito assented, but with a half-reservation ; the vision was sufficiently clear to make him determine to sit up all night on guard. The Indian

guides came back and crouched by the fire that the *arriero* kindled. "*Oro*," they said significantly to Juanito, but nothing more. They seemed indifferent whether the strangers entered the mine or not; they had pointed it out to them.

Without giving their halting-place too much the appearance of a barricaded camp, the young men managed to pile up the saddles and other things so as to obstruct the trail leading down, and spread their blankets beneath a shelving rock that protected them from above. John, though on the eve of his fortune, perhaps involving fabulous riches, was asleep in five minutes. After his strange experiences among the treasures of the Silver City, the awe which historic mysteries inspire could not affect him as at first. But Juanito was sleepless. He expected a subtle attack. He distrusted, too, the guides. He turned over the leaves of the old Spanish book and wished he could read.

But morning found them safe. Just as the sun gilded the cliffs, they crawled from beneath their shelters and went down to the stream to bathe.

Coffee was made, and then, after explicit directions to the *arriero* to await their return, and to keep an eye constantly upon the horses, they armed themselves with carbine and revolver and followed the stream up the cañon towards its source. Their guides indicated to them that they should enter the hole in the cliff. But Juanito refused, and the Indians followed after, loading themselves with their provisions, coils of cordage, and torches of pine wood.

Everything had pointed (the night before) to a close proximity of the mine ; but both the young men felt averse (for some occult reason) to entering the passage pointed out by the guides. For nearly two hours they tramped through the rock-ribbed cañon, sometimes in the stream, again climbing over slippery rocks and clinging to narrow ledges. At last they reached an opening, an amphitheatre-like basin, where vast heaps of scorix and broken rock indicated to John's eye another vent of the mine. They examined the great cavernous fissure carefully. Suddenly Juanito leaped aside with an exclamation of joy. A

red serpent was painted on one of the stones of the lintel. The boys looked at each other with strange sensations, and then proceeded to curiously examine the totem. It corresponded rudely, but surely, with the red serpent on the old parchment Juanito wore on his heart.

But the morning was well-nigh spent; and they entered the tunnel with little delay, the cool cavern receiving them at once, as into another world — a world of darkness, in which they groped their way following the Indians with their smoking torches.

The tunnel, or drift, was so high they could at first walk in it upright. They passed several lateral drifts (called *cruceros*) which indicated to John a mine of great magnitude. The torches lighted the path in an uncertain way, and they were constantly stumbling upon one another. Still the Indians tramped on towards the heart of the mountain. Barefooted as they were, their shuffling footsteps were hardly audible. Suddenly John's foot struck against an object that gave out a metallic sound. He stooped and picked it up,

calling to the Indians to bring their torches. Juanito quickly detected through the rust the gleam of copper. He pronounced it an Indian axe or chisel. This, after much rubbing, it was shown to be ; a primitive cutting-instrument such as the Indians made centuries ago.

"A good find," said John, "for copper axes and coins were reckoned part of the tribute from the province of Coatelicamar. We must be near the head of the drift."

As he said this, they stumbled over a low mound. This upon examination proved to be a heap of those same copper axes mixed with many other objects of a different shape. There were stone hammers, gouges and chisels, made of fine serpentine rock, with their edges polished to a point, and some curious knives of obsidian.

At sight of them, their thoughts quickly reverted to the request of the good magistrate of Minatitlan. "Bring me an axe of bronze," he had said. "And he shall have it, too, the best there is here," said John ; "and a nugget added — if we find one." Here, then, were the tools of those primitive

miners; their axes and knives of bronze — or hardened copper — and flint, and their hammers, mauls and wedges of stone. With but these simple tools those patient laborers of past centuries had penetrated the rock to this great distance, in pursuit of the glittering veins and pockets of gold.

A few steps farther they went on, and then were abruptly halted by a wall of rock directly across their path. "As I thought," said John, "this is the end of the main adit; and no gold yet in sight. These torches give too little light. Let me examine the walls with my lantern." He flashed the light of the bull's-eye upon the rock, tapping it occasionally with a hammer. Suddenly he called out: "Here, Juanito! Come here, and pound with all your might."

He had discovered a fissure that seemed to lead into an opening beyond. Under Juanito's sturdy blows, the crumbling rock yielded; the hammer broke through and fell out of sight into darkness. John flashed in his light, and then drew back with an exclamation of wonder, and passed his hand over his eyes, as though dazzled.

Juanito eagerly peered in. Without a word he recovered his hammer, and went to work again with redoubled vigor.

While they were thus at work the Indians sat unconcernedly upon the mound of copper axes. They were wholly indifferent, apparently, to the exciting scene before them. They seemed to think it a part of the programme that the "great man from over the sea" and the "little brother from the coast" should find what they sought. John marvelled at their indifference, and said as much to Juanito, who replied, that there was little to wonder at in their behavior; that they had, all their lives, been accustomed to obey the head man of their town without question, and to look upon the acts of those above them as in every way satisfactory.

"Now let *señorito* look into this *bolsa*—this pocket of gold; there it lies, in a glittering heap, winking and blinking at us like living eyes."

"*Una bolsa de oro*"—a pocket of gold—as Juanito termed it; but it seemed to John rather an accumulation by the hand of man, than a deposit by

nature's processes. The young man was at a loss to account for it ; he had heard of caves and pockets of pure silver ; but never of gold, in this shape and condition. Juanito assented that there was no doubt the Indians themselves had placed it there, for the gold was not in that condition of the metal when found in mines originally opened. There were nuggets and *pepitas* — or kernels of gold, and fragments of golden ore, as it had been cut out of the vein ; all heaped together in this little cavern, lining it like the sparkling crystals in a geode.

"There must be thousands of dollars here," said John.

"Thousands ! No, millions ! *Millones ; señorito* is a millionaire — *un millonario !*"

"If I am, then Juanito is," assented John.

Juanito shook his head : "No, I am not yet ready to be rich. Let *señorito* give me enough to free my people, to provide for them while they live ; the rest is *señorito's*. *Vaya !* let us get it out."

With a calabash, furnished by the Indians,

Juanito, as the willing servant of the Little Master, scooped the golden treasure into a leather sack. "Ah!" he murmured admiringly, as *pepitas* and nuggets rolled into the sack, "ah! what a fortune has Juanito found to-day. More gold than all his people ever had; more than Señor Torres, *el rico* of Yucatan! More even than the great Malinche ever saw! And it was all heaped up by the Indians, hundreds of years ago; all their toil was for the enrichment of *señorito*," he went on talking rapidly in the most excited manner as he worked. "Better so than that Cortez should have had it; or even Coatelicamar. *Senorito*, I think the poor miners hid this here for themselves, expecting to keep it. And why did they not carry it away? Perhaps they were slain; perhaps they were called out to fight the soldiers of Montezuma. Perhaps — ah! look at the gold! There! now we have nearly all; it is an empty pocket, now. But I cannot lift it; we shall have to call the Indians. Two of them can hardly carry it!"

John stood, hardly hearing Juanito, deeply plunged in thought, lost in contemplation of the

past ; asking himself whether the gold belonged to him, or to the Indians ; vaguely recalling pictures of the barbaric miners that once toiled here ; naked, with rude implements. Here, virtually in his own ownership, lay the result of their labor for many, many years, which they had wrested from the secret places of the earth with toil, and blood, and groans. The old scruples, the old yearnings for the uplifting and good of the native race of owners, took possession of him, as in the treasure-vaults of the Silver City. He could not look upon this gold as treasure-trove.

Juanito seemed to divine his thoughts. "Gold is good !" said he ; "and it is better in the hands of *señorito* than of these Indians. These many, many years, it has been awaiting *señorito's* arrival ; not to take it now would be offending the great *Dios*, who made the earth and the gold hidden in the earth. Had they needed it, could they have used it, they could have come any day and carried it all away."

But John's thoughts went back and back ; to his New England home ; to his patient mother, whose

faith in him and in his future was so strong; to his unfortunate father, whom he had been the means of reuniting to the family; then he thought again, with a romantic regret, upon the renounced possibilities of his life in the Silver City; there, he had hoped, lay his life work; there he had found a conscientious primitive people, living in ignorance; he had hoped to guide them to a life of worthy industries and enterprises. He had in his mind an ideal kingdom under the sway of the lovely Princess Hia and her brother. How rudely he had been wrenched away! And now among these simple people of the hills, a similar opportunity opened. He inclined strongly to stay among them. Perhaps, too, some day, when her brother no longer needed her, he would again set sail for Cozumel and penetrate through the country of the Sublevados and again reach the Silver City, and bear the lovely princess away, and bring her into Mexico, where the peaceful people of this golden country should accept her as their queen, and together they would spend their lives in elevating their subjects. Although not a strict believer in special providences,

he yet saw the means divinely sent for accomplishing a mission truly divine.

A voice broke in on his romantic reverie :
“ *Vámanos, señorito* ; let us go ; it is getting late.”

The Indians assumed the additional burden of the sack of gold, and turned their faces in the direction of the mine's mouth. They shuffled along with heavy tread, their spluttering torches faintly lighting the path behind.

In half an hour, they had reached the first of the lateral galleries, a dark hole yawning in the left-hand wall — the second they had passed coming in. Here their guides paused, set down the sack, and motioned them to examine the rock. They broke into exclamations of astonishment and joy ; for it was gold-bearing quartz, milk-white, streaked with golden threads. These lines of gold led downward into the recesses of the *crucero*, or cross-gallery, indicating beyond a doubt that richer deposits lay beyond.

“ Stay you here, Juanito, with our treasure, and I will examine this ledge.” John lighted the dark lantern again, which he had reserved in case the

torches gave out. But Juanito demurred ; he did not approve of the Little Master going in alone ; there might be any number of dangers.

“ But, Juanito,” laughed John, “ I shall merely trace the *echada* — the dip of the ledge — to find if the gold continues. I will be gone not more than half an hour.”

Juanito gloomily acquiesced.

“ *Vaya, con Dios, señorito.*—Go, and God be with you, Little Master ; but Juanito likes it not. If *señorito* does not return in one half-hour, I shall seek him ; my heart is full of fear.”

He threw his arms about John’s shoulders and clasped him tightly, then released him. And as John took up his rifle, and adjusted the lantern to his belt, he besought again, “ Have a care, beloved master ; look well to your rifle and revolver ; caves and mines are the lurking-places of *ladrones* and bandits ; remember Juanito’s vision of last night ; it *may* not have been his imagination ! ”

John laughingly assured him that he had no fears ; then disappeared, the twinkling of his light revealing his presence only a little way. Then

Juanito sat down with the Indians, who, as soon as John had gone, crouched by the sack, and began to chat together. They talked with unreserved freedom, as their conversation was in their own language, of which they assumed the stranger to be ignorant.

One of them took out a pouch of tobacco and some corn husks and began to roll a cigarette, in which occupation he was joined by the other.

"The sack is heavy," said the one who had lighted the match.

The other assented.

"Much gold."

"Much."

"What will the great man do with it?"

"Who knows?"

"What will the hairy-faced man say about it?"

"Who knows?"

Juanito, already excited, thrilled coldly at mention of the "hairy-faced man." Whom else could they mean than Tomaso? He grasped the loquacious Indian by the arm, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and calmly smoked, "Was the hairy-



"AHEAD!" JUANITO COMMANDED.



faced man the one the alcalde had placed in the calaboose ? ”

No surprise was manifested that Juanito had understood their Zapotic. They answered unmoved. Yes, they thought he was the same.

“ The Spaniard, short of stature, with gray beard ? ”

There was no doubt of it.

“ Where is he now ? ”

“ Who knows ? ”

“ What did he say to them ? ”

“ Nothing. ”

“ Where did he go ? ”

“ Into the *crucero* ! ”

“ Was he alone ? ”

“ He was alone. ”

“ Come, then, ” cried Juanito, “ come with me into the *crucero* ; there is no time to lose ! ”

They deliberately lifted their torches and prepared to follow him.

“ Ahead ! ” he commanded.

They moved in, Juanito following. They evidently saw no reason for haste ; but Juanito urged

them to their utmost speed, fuming over their delays, choking with grief at thought of what might happen before he could reach *señorito*. He knew that in the Indians he had neither allies nor enemies; they would remain neutral, whatever happened. He longed to shout, but was afraid to lest that should precipitate the Spaniard on his friend. And Juanito knew enough of Tomaso to be sure that he would kill the Little Master, out of pure malice, even if he himself were certain of being shot in the act. In doubt, in grief, every second of time weighted with horror, Juanito crept after the Indians, with eyes and ears alert to catch the slightest sign of life ahead, the faintest sound. They turned an angle of the passage and there they heard signs of life; soft footsteps, and the click of a hammer — John tapping the gold-bearing rock. At the same time there was the twinkle of a light — assurance of safety. But, just as Juanito was about to relieve his agony by a shout of joy, a dark form darted across the lane of light, and a muffled fall was followed by a death-like silence.

CHAPTER XII.

FATE REPEATS.

WALKING carefully along, alternately glancing at the path before him and at the wall of the cut, John had progressed but slowly. The *crucero* was narrower than the main gallery, and not so high ; it was also tortuous and rough, as it followed along the gold-vein in its windings, ever twisting and zizzagging about like a great petrified golden serpent. It was like following an ever-unwinding thread, deep and deeper into the centre of the earth, and he became so fascinated and absorbed that he thought no longer of the surmised dangers of the cut. Wondering at the sight that every succeeding footstep unfolded, he lost himself in speculation as to the reasons of the ancient miners for boring out this long tunnel and, apparently, leaving the real vein untouched. It was

all a part of the mystery surrounding the mine. Perhaps, as Juanito had suggested, all this had been done as merely preparatory, and that war — unexpected and disastrous — had come upon the tribe, causing them to withdraw all their miners to fight in the field. Again, it might have been their manner of storing their wealth ; leaving the rich veins exposed, ready for the chisel when the gold should be needed. As the time had never arrived, or, owing to some disaster, the gold had not been disturbed, it existed now as in that remote age when first brought to light, firmly cemented within its walls of quartz.

A feeling of awe took possession of the lonely investigator as he advanced downward, guided by the golden clue. It would not have seemed strange if the ancient Aztecs had appeared to demand of him reasons for his intrusion. He shivered at this suggestion, as though a cold draught had struck him, and looked around. In the opposite wall was a cleft — a hole that seemed to descend into the very base of the mountain where it had its foundation walls over the abyss of the terrestrial fires. He

turned his lantern in that direction ; suddenly, and as it lighted up a little space, he fancied that a shadowy form, having human semblance, and with baleful eyes, retreated slowly into its recesses. But it did not reappear, and he laughed softly to himself : " This peering into dead men's treasure-vaults has shaken my nerves."

Had he but thrown a light, at intervals, behind him, this story of his search might have had a different termination. For the formless shade emerged again from the cleft, and followed silently on his track ; it neared him — by thrusting back with his rifle John might have touched it ; nearer it drew, suddenly assuming concrete shape, and showing, in the brief glimpse as John suddenly again looked backward, a terrible form with hand lifted above his head.

"Tomaso !" This one cry only, as the hand descended, weighted with the iron bar it held, and John fell.

It was at this juncture that Juanito turned the angle in the cut and witnessed the final act in the dreadful pantomime. He at first knew not whether

it was friend or foe that lay silent on the rock, friend or foe that darted across the space into the lateral chasm. But he sped forward, rifle raised. All seemed void, in the darkness, as he reached the cleft; but a noise of rattling stones sounded within, and he discharged his rifle after it. The noise ceased, swallowed up in the report and its thunderous reverberation. Before it had died away, another report followed, this time from *within* the crevice, and a bullet bounded against the rock behind Juanito.

The Indians, with their torches, had arrived upon the scene, and had illumined the group so that the hidden bandit had had a fairer mark than his foe. But Juanito was unharmed; and he rapidly sent a half-dozen revolver-shots into the darkness.

As the last echo of the reverberations died away, retreating further and further into the drift, Juanito fancied he heard a groan, or an imprecation—he could not distinguish which. Then all was quiet.

Turning now to the silent shape in the *crucero*, the boy motioned the Indians to lift John carefully.

They turned him over, and raised him, so that the torch-light flared in his face ; it was still and pallid. An intense longing possessed Juanito to clasp his brother close in his arms, and bear him upon his own breast into daylight and open air. His heart burned with the pain of repressed emotion ; his eyes were dry, but a-fire with mingled grief and anger. The Indians, unmoved as ever, obeyed him, gathering the Little Master into their arms, and retreating with him towards the main drift of the mine. Detaching the lantern from John's belt, Juanito re-lighted it and fastened it to his own. Then he slowly retreated after the Indians, his back to them and his face to any concealed foe. His was a most perilous position, for the lantern-glare showed his movements ; but it also projected a broad lane of light towards the supposed point whence the enemy might appear. Thus they fell back, in good order, towards their only known avenue of escape.

As they retreated, when a rod away from the cleft in the wall, something seemed to emerge from it — a shapeless something, yet to Juanito's eyes

having the general outline of a human being — and danced across the drift and back again.

Bang! the rifle-roar again filled the cavern; Juanito was amazed. He cared little for anything living in the flesh, and was prepared to take any odds; but this phantom-like apparition through which his bullet sped and caused no harm — what should he do? Still he was battling for more than one life; and he resolutely quieted the superstitious suggestions that thronged his brain. He had still twelve shots left; in his rifle six, and six in the revolver which he had reloaded.

Meanwhile, the sad procession slowly moved along. Following after it, as though drawn out by a draught of air, before Juanito's burning eyes trooped a constantly-increasing number of the formless ones — dun, misty shapes. They danced in the gloom beyond the lane of light, never emerging clearly out of the obscurity, but pressing upon one another and constantly shifting places, in restless pantomime. Despite his courage, Juanito felt his limbs shake and his heart thump tremulously. He gazed more in awe than horror.

"*Santa Maria!* These are Indians, the old miners, who have perished in the mine. They would not harm me, an Indian of Malinche's own race. Why did I shoot?"

Suddenly, like the drifting away of a cloud before a breeze, these phantoms disappeared, dissolved into the gloom of the cavern. The retreating group had reached the main drift, and here they halted, to gain strength, before carrying their insensible burden on to the cave's mouth. "The gold—what should they do with the gold?" the Indians questioned dumbly.

Juanito shook his head: "Never mind the gold; bear the master quickly out to open air."

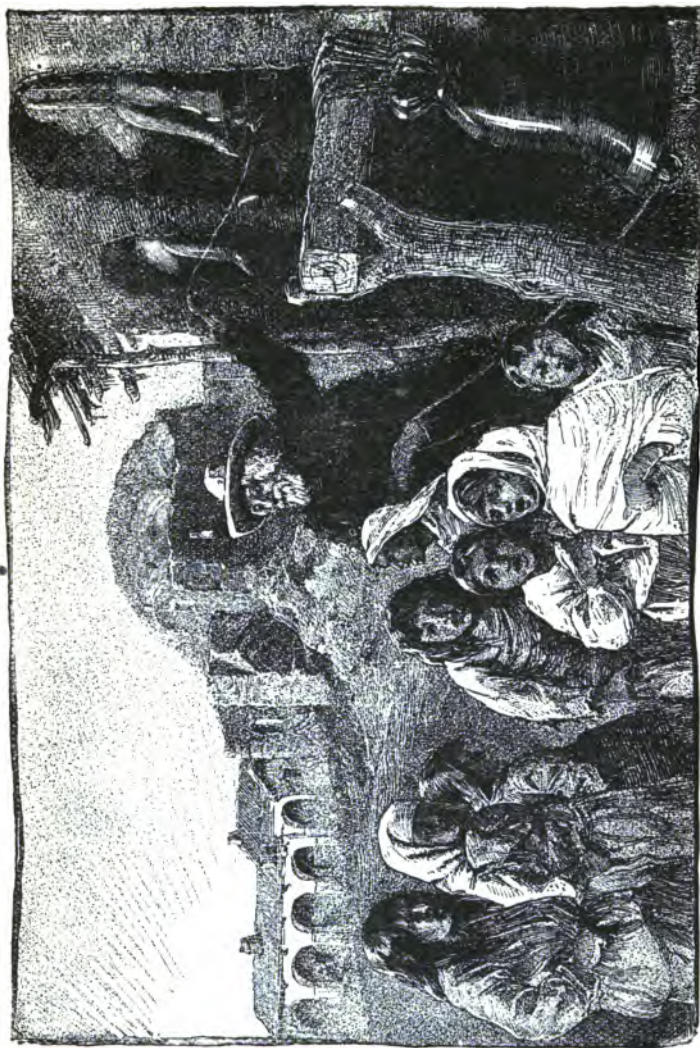
The Indians reassumed their burden. As they stooped to take up the unconscious form, their quick ears caught a sound of approaching footsteps. They signed to Juanito. It came from the direction of the outer world, not from the *crucero*.

Placing the Indians with their charge behind a projecting rock, Juanito covered the light, and awaited the coming of whatever caused the sound, crouched close to the wall, with rifle tightly clasped.

Louder grew the murmur, swelling to a muffled roar, and betokening many footsteps, as well as voices. Now lights gleamed. He shouted: "*Hola!*" "Who are ye?"

Confused cries, but in friendly tones, answered him, as of several voices at once replying to his call. The next moment joyful exclamations issued from the new-comers, greeting Juanito and the guides, followed by lamentations over the body of *el Americano*; for they were Indians from Tamaulapa, headed by the alcalde, who had sallied out in search of Malinche's kinsman, superstitiously drawn perhaps by the red serpent of the ancient totem.

They embraced each other eagerly; and then willing hands volunteered to relieve the patient guides, and the retreat was at once begun. In due time, the entrance to the mine was reached; daylight greeted them; the setting sun fell slantwise across the cañon wall. A terrible weight seemed to roll off Juanito's shoulders as they emerged; but the cloud in his brain still hung there, like a veil before his eyes. Had it all happened in one



"AND THE LITTLE CHILDREN SANG THE ANGELUS."



day? Yes. Between the rising and the going down of the sun, he had passed through a lifetime (it seemed to him) of joy and fear.

They bore the body to the stream and bathed the still face and hands, and washed the clotted blood from the wound; but, though the breath of life was still in him, John did not return to consciousness. Then they prepared a litter and began their march homeward, taking turns as carriers until the rolling river was in sight, the hamlet in the orange grove was reached, and they halted in front of the *cabildo*, where a bed was quickly prepared, and the *medico*, the native doctor, sent for.

Four days of intense agony passed by, during which John neither woke nor gave evidence of sensibility. During all this time Juanito remained by his side, watching with unresting vigilance. But one morning at dawn, as the wrens in the thatch were twittering softly together, John opened his eyes. It was a simple thing for one to do, yet it startled Juanito more than that shot from Tomaso's revolver, in the mine. "*Graciàs á Dios!*" he

presently exclaimed, "Thanks to God ! *señorito* has awakened from his sleep !"

The pale lips moved as though trying to form words. Juanito placed his ear down close.

"Tomaso ? I dreamt I saw Tomaso !"

"Not here, Little Master ; he is in the mine. The *alcalde* thinks him dead."

"What did he do to me ?"

"He escaped, and followed us ; he struck you down, in the *crucero*, and I — O, *señorito*, he will never trouble us again."

"Our friends, the Indians — they were not false ?"

"No, *amigo mio*, they were true ; you are back in their town."

Lips and eyelids fluttered again, but closed, a sigh of peace heaved the weak breast, and the tired questioner dropped back into slumber.

The sun hung straight over the hut when John awoke again. This time his glance was untroubled ; he recognized the faithful Juanito, and returned his delighted caresses with heartfelt fervor.

"Juanito *mio*, how long have I been here ?"

"Five days, *señorito*."

"The gold — did Tomaso get that?"

"No; the alcalde has it, keeping it for you."

Long and many talks followed, day after day. Among other accounts Juanito told of the formless phantoms in the mine, which John at once assured him were but shapes of rifle-smoke. Of far more importance were certain conversations with the alcalde and the presidente. Meantime, his recovery went surely on. Not a man, woman or child in the village but lent a hand and brought a gift to further his convalescence. Everything which could add to his comfort or tempt his appetite appeared in the *cabildo* as by magic.

One beautiful balmy day, about a month after the adventure in the mine, the beloved *el Americano* rejoiced the people by appearing at the door of the *cabildo*. By Juanito's aid, he walked slowly through the orange grove, to a verdant knoll, surrounded by a ring of palm and fruit-trees. A busy scene there met his gaze; the men of the village were building a house. Its frame was already up, some of the workmen were plastering the walls, others

laying the thatch of bright palm-leaves, and all were hurrying, as though working in anticipation of some joyous event. It was a beautiful situation for a dwelling, with an emerald slope reaching to the river and a view bounded only by the distant cliffs.

John admired, and praised. "Who is this palace for?" he asked. "Do you expect a *cura* to be settled among you?"

The alcalde laughed, and made answer: "No, *señorito*, not a *cura*, but a teacher;" then he translated the question to his neighbors, who suspended their labors that they too might enjoy it, and indulge in a chorus of laughter.

A week later, the house was done; a broad veranda distinguished it above all the rest, and it was the grandest structure in the village. Hammocks (woven by the busy fingers of Indian maidens) were hung in it; trees and flowers were planted around it. Then the people assembled about the *cabildo*, clad in their best and brightest garments, their faces eager and joyous. Suddenly, there broke forth the sound of singing voices;

white garments gleamed beneath the glossy-leaved orange-trees, and up through the avenue of palm-trees came a score or two of children chanting in their native tongue a delightful song of greeting.

The alcalde led them, brought them to the doorway in which the young men were standing, awaiting the simple ceremonies of which they had been apprised.

"Most noble *señor*," he said, "and Little Brother, ours, behold your people, come to conduct you to your home."

They had brought the beloved white stranger their choicest offerings; their love and loyalty. John accepted their trust with unfeigned joy, feeling that a new life had begun, that his life-work lay well-defined before him. Nor did it bear any longer a relation to the gold mines of his search. The gold lay before him, but it seemed valueless. He looked upon it with an Arcadian indifference.

"We believed you would stay with us, even as you promised," the alcalde went on, with simple dignity. "We believe you will find us people

good to dwell amongst. All we have we now lay at your feet; only remain with us, and teach us the wisdom of the East, the skill of your race, its learning and its religion. Our Little Brother, after his separation of generations, has at last rejoined his kindred. He is content to stay, and for his mother, his brother, and his sister. We have sent swift runners to Itzlan with gold to ransom them. Soon Juanito shall welcome them to his home."

Gratitude and gladness shone in the eyes of the two young men as they turned toward each other. Surely their search for the Lost Mine had been blessed. John swore in his inmost heart that Montezuma's gold should never be put to ignoble use in this, his little ideal commonwealth. The thirst for gold, the toil and strife for gold — how pitiable, how dark and bloody and terrible this gold hunger had made the history of earth and the human race.

The alcalde led to the new house, all the people following, singing the glad hymns of their race. In the centre of the village, a stone's throw from

their new dwelling, were the ruins of a church. Once, fifty years ago, it had stood there fair and stately, its stone tower hung with bells, and reaching upward toward the sky.

Now, it lay in heaps of ruins; for an earthquake had one day shaken it — shaken it for but a moment — and it no longer bore the semblance of a church. But in a corner of its walls, beneath a roof of thatch, its bells still hung. And here, as the dusk of night drew nigh, came the old sacristan (self-appointed) and rang the chimes for the *oracion*, while little children gathered round and sang the *Angelus* — their evening prayer. Then starry darkness and sleep fell upon the peaceful village, and the happy dwellers in it.

